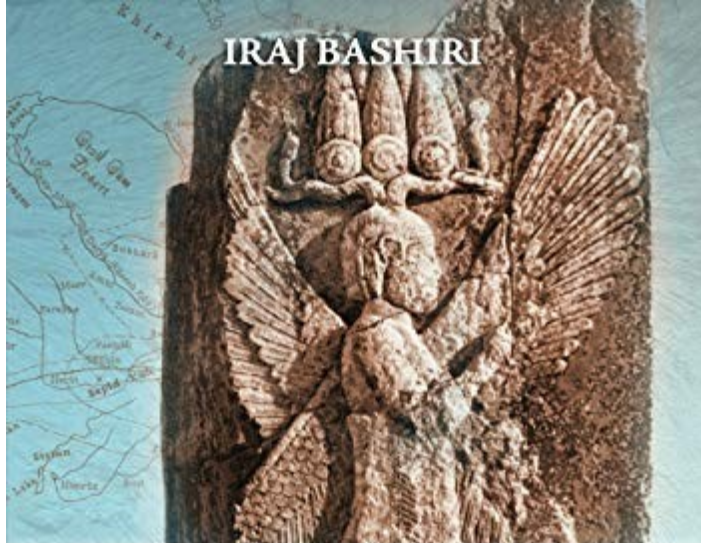


IRAJ BASHIRI



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COSMOLOGY, MYTHOLOGY, HISTORY

Second Edition



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First published in the United States of America in 2012 by Cognella, Inc.

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16 15 14 13 12 1 2 3 4 5

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN:



www.cognella.com 800.200.3908

INTRODUCTION

The ancient history of a people is a record of their collective identity; it promotes their cause among their neighboring nations and determines their stance in relation to other nations. Traditionally, it is expected of the leaders who occupy the seats of power previously held by prominent rulers, in the case of Iran, the seats of Cyrus II the Great and Darius I the Great, to safeguard their legacy and enhance awareness about their deeds and accomplishments. That is why Sassanid rulers, Ardashir I and Shapur I in particular, set themselves the task to revive the glory of the empire of the Achaemenids and glorify the traditions of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes.

Contemporary Iranian leadership, however, has adopted an unfortunate stance. Rather than encouraging scholars to study ancient Iran, it has chosen to formally discourage them. The recent decree issued by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, is the case in point. He has decreed that scholars should divert their attention away from research and study of ancient Iran and concentrate their efforts exclusively on the study of Islamic Iran. What Khamenei, and those who implement his will, do not take into consideration is the fact that the study of Iranian cosmology and mythology, so essential for gaining knowledge about the dynamics of Twelver Shi'ism, is inseparably tied to the study of ancient Iranian history. In the absence of governmental support for the study of ancient Iranian culture, therefore, it is incumbent upon all those with an interest in the development of contemporary world civilizations to support and promote research and instruction about ancient Iranian history and culture.

The present volume is a fairly comprehensive study of ancient Iranian history in the context of Iranian cosmology and mythology. It is an attempt to present a continuous line of rulership in Iranian lands for which the concept of the *farr* has served as the guiding light. *Ahura Mazda* issued the *farr* originally to *Gayomart*, the first man and first king of Iran. The section on cosmology concentrates on *Ahura Mazda* and the *Ahuric* Order that emanates from him. On the one hand, it charts the development of Zoroastrianism from Mazdaism, and, on the other hand, it describes the bond between Iran's mythical hero-saints and real world kings like Cyrus the Great and Darius I.

The section on mythology, focusing on the deeds of hero-saints like Siyavosh and Kaykhosrau, describes how the rulership of the hero-saints promoted the *farr*, and how their contributions culminated in ushering in the unique creed of Zoroaster, a creed based on the triad: good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. The subtext for the study of this part of the volume is the *Shahname* (book of kings) of Firdowsi, which is centered on the concept of the *farr*, the fulcrum of Iranian rulership from ancient times to the present time.

The section on history is divided into three parts. Part one is a study of life on the Iranian plateau from early times to the rise of Cyrus II the Great and the formation of the Achaemenid Empire. The prominent place in this part is given to

the Empire of the Medes. Part two deals with the Achaemenid Empire, especially the impact that ancient Egypt could have had on the newly born Persian Empire. Here, the lifework of Darius I the Great is examined in detail. The fall of the Empire to Alexander III the Great and the rule of the Seleucids complete this part. The third part deals with the rule of the Parthians and the Sassanids, with special emphasis placed on the rulers of the latter dynasty. The advent of the prophet Mani and the reforms of Mazdak are highlighted. A summary of the accomplishments and shortcomings of the major dynasties concludes the study of each dynasty.

Synopses of two books by Xenophon, *Cyropedia* and *Anabasis*, are placed in the Appendix. These books, usually mentioned in relation to Cyrus the Great and Cyrus the Younger, respectively, are rarely highlighted in the literature about these two figures. The full text of three documents discussed in the volume, the “Cyrus Cylinder,” “The Rise of Ardashir,” and the “Invention of Chess and Backgammon,” are also in the Appendix. In addition, major concepts and points of interest included in the volume appear as sidebars throughout the text.

Finally, the information in the volume comes from three sources previously published by this author through the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan: *From the Hymns of Zarathushtra to the Songs of Borbad* (2003), *The Impact of Egypt on Ancient Iran* (2007), and *Turk and Tur in Firdowsi's Shahname* (2009). The reader is encouraged to consult those sources for additional information.

Iraj Bashiri
September 2011
Minneapolis

THE COSMIC AGE

The ancient Iranians had a much less concrete, albeit more definite, view of their cosmos than either their mythic hero-saints, who believed in Lord *Mazda*, or their historic inheritors, who followed *Ahura Mazda* and other gods. To the *Mazdian* mind, existence was the result of a series of generative cosmic thought cycles that began in a void. Within these cycles, thought (*Manah*), a creation of *Mazda*, is qualified by truth (*Arta*) and, through devotion (*Armaiti*), is transformed into expression (*Khshathra Vairya*). *Khshathra Vairya* is the zenith of the achievement of *Manah*, as *Manah* strives for perfection (*Haurvatat*) and eventual immortality (*Ameretat*).¹

The temporal distance, temporal in the abstract sense, between the emergence of *Manah* and *Ameretat*, is a 12,000-year cosmic conflict divisible into four equal 3,000-year periods.² During this period, a battle is waged between *Vohu* (good) and *Aka* (evil). In phases, the battle moves from the elevated cosmic level to the mythic realm. When the hero-saints in the mythic realm see it as appropriate, they move the battle to the historic age. The history of the world and, necessarily, of Iran, falls within the confines of this time period and this conflict.

Of the four 3,000-year periods,³ the first 3,000 years is the duration of a Void into which *Manah* blossoms and confronts a choice between *Vohu* and *Aka*. In the battle that occurs within the Void, *Vohu* is victorious and chooses *Arta* (right, truth) as its guiding light towards immortality. *Aka*, defeated, withdraws and falls into a swoon. During the second phase, *Vohu Manah*, through the intermediacy of *Asha Vahishta* and *Spenta Armaiti*, builds *Khshathra Vairya*, an ideal kingdom ruled by truth, piety, and harmony.⁴ During the third phase, *Aka* finds its way into *Khshathra Vairya* and contaminates its serenity. Except for *Gayomart*, whose seed miraculously survives, *Khshathra Vairya* is turned into a kingdom with polluted waters, defiled earth, poisoned plants, and dead animals. Worse yet, evil, the cause of the desolation, is trapped in the devastated world.⁵ If *Aka* had stayed away from *Khshathra Vairya*, everything would have progressed beautifully and *Vohu Manah's Khshathra Vairya* would have achieved *Haurvatat* (perfection). But everything did not proceed as planned. In the fourth and last phase, the truth that existed in the thoughts, words, and deeds of *Gayomart* was transferred to a mythic world populated by mythic beings like *Kayumars*, the first king, and the first man. In time, mythical hero-saints turned the affairs of state to historic figures like truth-worshipping Darius I the Great. It became the task of these mortal beings to not only restore the creator's *Khshathra Vairya* to its original form, but also to move it along through *Haurvatat* to *Ameretat* (immortality).

MANAH AND THE GREAT SPENTAS

The world of *Manah* is a thought or *Mazdian*⁶ world that issues from a Void

susceptible to thought, expression, and action, respectively. *Manah* blossoms into the Void as the result of a primordial thought seed. A particular vibrancy distinguishes it from the Void. The same thought seed also brings about *Aka*. We know the twin as *Aka* (bad, evil) and *Vohu* (good, benevolent). Both *Vohu Manah* and *Aka Manah* seek immortality, but only one has the potential to achieve it.

VOHU MANAH

Even though the conflict between *Vohu Manah*, the personification of good intention,⁷ and *Aka Manah* lasted for a long time, eventually it ended in favor of *Vohu Manah*.⁸ *Aka Manah* was forced to retreat into the depths of the Void. Not much was heard from him for the rest of this initial 3,000-year period.

Taking this opportunity, *Vohu Manah*, in reality thought incarnate, charted a creation plan that would culminate in the achievement of *Khshathra Vairya* or Holy Dominion, a firm first step for the realization of *Ameretat*. His projected kingdom had the potential of depriving *Aka Manah* from having any role at all in the cosmos.

The importance of *Vohu Manah* to the Mazdian cosmos and, consequently, to the existence of the world as we know it, cannot be over-emphasized. Every good action begins with a good word, and every good word is preceded by a good thought. Since *Vohu Manah* expected his *Khshathra Vairya* to serve as the model of good action, action that would lead to perfection and immortality, he had no option but to safeguard the path of good through to expression and, from there, to action.

Summarizing the role of the Mazdian *Vohu Manah*, therefore, it can be said that *Vohu Manah* is the seed of good reason and grasp. Without *Vohu Manah*'s knowledge, no word is expressed and no action is taken. If they did happen, they would be the words and deeds of *Aka Manah*.⁹

ASHA VAHISHTA

The kingdom that *Vohu Manah* projects is populated by thought beings who, by nature, are susceptible to influence by good as well as evil. *Aka Manah* is in retreat at the present, but it is not kept away forever. For this reason, *Vohu Manah* devises a system that is protected from evil. In other words, he imbues the system with *Asha Vahishta*, an aspect of him that evil cannot penetrate. Creation of *Asha Vahishta* is undertaken expressly to protect *Vohu Manah*'s future truthful thought beings from the Lie (*drug*).¹⁰

The creation of *Asha Vahishta*, the guardian of the creation of fire, as we shall see, is *Vohu Manah*'s most fundamental step toward the realization of his projected kingdom.¹¹ Without order in his universe, the Lie would promote chaos and extinguish any hope for the achievement of *Haurvatat*, the prerequisite for the achievement of *Ameretat*.¹²

Are the goodness that comes from *Vohu Manah* and the order and truth that are contributed by *Asha Vahishta* sufficient for the future prosperity of the beings who would populate *Vohu Manah's Khshathra Vairya*? Would they become pious and benevolent by dint of being created? Definitely not. Goodness and Truth without a catalyst to relate one to the other are two isolated, barren cosmic functions. *Asha Vahishta*, therefore, thought *Spenta Armaiti*, guardian of creation of earth, into existence in order to fill this very vacuum. *Spenta Armaiti* inspires devotion and obedience and sustains good thought and truth,¹³ which are ushered in by *Asha Vahishta* until the desired *Khshathra Vairya* is achieved.¹⁴

KHSHATHRA VAIRYA

In order for the kingdom of the good mind represented by “desirable dominion” to be permanently separated from the world of the dormant *Aka Manah*, a metallic barrier (sky) was formed between the two kingdoms. From the substance of this dome, the sky, over the kingdom of good, water was created. Water subsequently brought forth land that brought forth plants. Plants in time gave rise to animals. At the end, *Gayomart*, the agent who would move the kingdom to *Haurvatat*, came into existence.¹⁵ *Khshathra Vairya*, guardian of the sky, did not allow a place for *Aka* the Lie.¹⁶

As the exact opposite of *Vohu Manah*, who created, *Aka Manah* was bent on destruction.¹⁷ In fact, the moment he recovered from his initial setback and saw a *Khshathra Vairya* destined for perfection, he broke through the sky and entered *Khshathra Vairya*. There he polluted the water, defiled the earth, poisoned the plants, and killed the first animal, the sacred white bull. He also killed *Gayomart*, the cosmic man.¹⁸

When he felt his destruction was total, *Aka* decided to leave *Khshathra Vairya*, but he could not find his way out. *Asha Vahishta* held him back. This was the Truth that permeated *Khshathra Vairya* and that *Vohu Manah* had created as a last defense against the Lie. With his fate sealed, *Aka Manah* became a prisoner in *Khshathra Vairya*.

Aka Manah's intrusion into *Khshathra Vairya* changed the whole scheme of things. The blissful world that *Vohu Manah* had intended was no longer attainable, not as long as it included an unbridled *Aka Manah*. To curb the excesses of *Aka Manah*, the creator created the *khvarnah* to, on the one hand, serve as a shield against evil, and, on the other hand, bestow legitimacy upon Mazda's deputy, *Gayomart*, and subsequent mythical and historical rulers.¹⁹

Gayomart

Gayomart appears first as a cosmic creation of Mazda in *Khshathra Vairya*. After *Aka Manah* kills him, his seed travels to the sun, where it is nurtured. From there, it is taken to the moon, where it is purified. Ultimately, the seed is deposited in the physical, material world, where it

grows in the form of a rhubarb plant with two stems attached at the base. One stem is *Mashiya*, the man; the other is *Mashiyana*, the woman. We know nothing about the marriage of *Mashiya* and *Mashiyana* other than that there were children, sweet children. The children were so sweet that the parents could not prevent themselves from devouring them. The Creator necessarily took sweetness out of children.¹ The mythical Kayumars and the hero-saints that populate Iranian mythology are the descendants of *Mashiya* and *Mashiyana*.²

1 For a detailed discussion of man, his role, and his allotted fate, see Zaehner, 1975, pp. 265–283.

2 See *Bundahishn* XV, 1–31.

HAURVATAT AND AMERETAT

The conflict between *Aka Manah* and *Vohu Manah* begins in the Void. It is disrupted while *Vohu Manah* is building his *Khshathra Vairya*. A new battle begins within the new kingdom between the creatures of *Vohu Manah* and the legions that *Aka Manah* brings forth. Whichever side totally destroys the other side achieves *Haurvatat*, i.e., wholeness and health.²⁰ The reward for this perfection is the achievement of *Ameretat*, long life that resides in the plant kingdom. No wonder she is referred to as the Guardian of plant creation.²¹

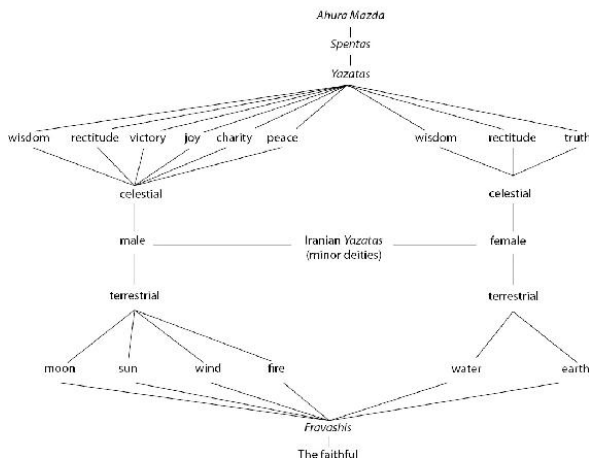
Cosmic *Khvarnah* or *Farr* (see also, Mythic *Farr* and Historic *Farr*)

During cosmic times, one of the major creations was the creation of the *khvarnah*, variously translated as “glory, charisma, and symbol of legitimacy.” In spite of these definitions, scholars attest to the difficulty of finding an appropriate definition for it. The reason is that *khvarnah* (or *farr*) has a different manifestation depending on the world and the levels at which it is being discussed. In the cosmic world, *khvarnah* appears as a cosmic force, or forces, that binds the universe together. In the mythic world, it appears as the blessing of a deity, or deities, that organizes aspects of life. In the historic world, it appears in various degrees in the creatures of *Abura Mazda*. A meaningful understanding of the *khvarnah*, therefore, would be one that takes the worlds and the levels of the concept into consideration.¹

1 For a discussion of the kingly glory, *khvarnah*, and those who possessed it, see *Zamyad Yasht*, XIX, 10–79.

THE YAZATAS

Another name for the *Yazatas* is the “Adorable Ones.” In importance, they are next to the *Amesha Spentas*. The *Yazatas* are abstractions of ideas, virtues, and concepts. Some *Yazatas* are Indo-European in origin. Some are Aryan concepts later retained by Zoroaster. The majority of the *Yazatas*, however, are Iranian. The *Yazatas*, which number in the hundreds of thousands, may be grouped into three categories: Indo-European *Yazatas*, Indo-Iranian *Yazatas*, and Iranian *Yazatas*.²²



Configuration of Iranian Yazatas

The Indo-European Yazatas

These Yazatas personify the elements of the cosmos. *Atar* (fire), *Apam-Napat* (water), *Aredvi-Sura-Anahita* (water), and *Vayu* (wind) are some of the most ancient Yazatas worshiped by the Indo-Europeans. *Anahita* seems to have eclipsed the Indo-European *Apam-Napat*.

The Indo-Iranian Yazatas

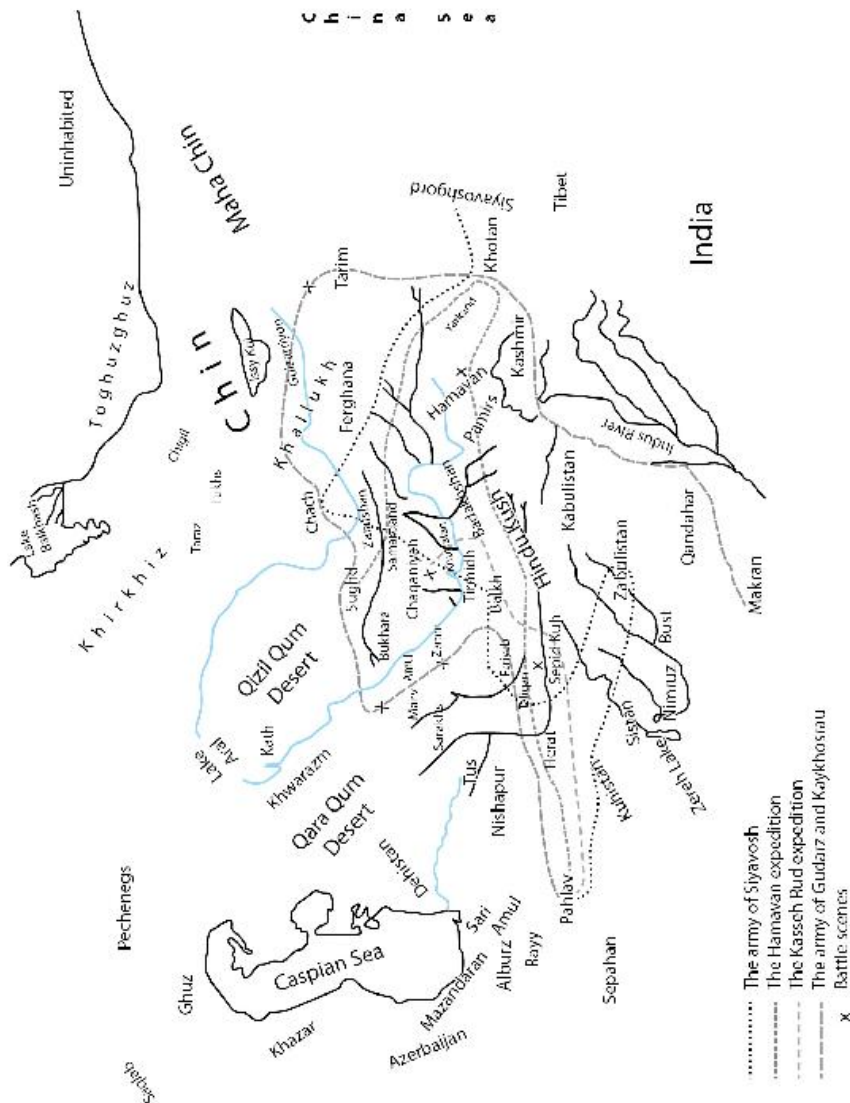
The Indo-Iranian Yazatas are: *Mithra*, *Airyaman*, *Haoma*, *Verethragna*, *Parendi*, *Rata*, and *Nairyosanha*.

The Iranian Yazatas

The Iranian Yazatas are: *Hvarekhshaeta*, *Maongahah*, *Tishtrya*, *Sraosha*, and *Rashnu*, as well as *Daena*, *Chisti*, *Erethe*, *Rasanstat*, *Akhshti*, *Vanghubi*, *Arshstat*, *Asman*, *Zam*, *Manthra Spenta*, and *Raocha*.

THE FUNCTION OF THE YAZATAS

The main task of the Yazatas is to assist the devout according to their function in relation to the *Spentas* and the people on the earth plane. In this regard, the Iranian Yazatas are divided into two subgroups: *Celestial Yazatas* (abstract, invisible) and *Terrestrial Yazatas* (concrete, visible).²³



Map of Military Expeditions in the Shahname

Mazdian Cosmology

Mazda

Manah (Spenta Mainyu)

Amesha Spentas

Vohu Manah, Asha Vahishta, Spenta Armaiti,

Khshathra Vairya, Haurvatat, Ameretat

Yazatas

Celestial Yazatas

Divine Wisdom: Daena, Chisti, Sraosha

Rectitude: Mithra, Rashnu, Arshtat, Erethe, Rasanstat

Victory and Contracts: *Verethragna*

Genius of Joy: *Raman*

Genius of Charity: *Rata*

Angel of Peace: *Akhshti*

Terrestrial *Yazatas*

Light: *Hvarekshaeta* (sun), *Maongahah* (moon)

Fire: *Atar*

Water: *Aredvi-Sura-Anahita*, *Apam-Napat*

Earth: *Zam*

Fravashis or souls of individual faithful

The Faithful

In working with Mazdian cosmology, it is important to emphasize that the world of *Manah*, from its inception in the Void to its materialization in *Khshathra Vairya* and its final struggle for perfection and immortality, is a thought world. It is a cosmic prototype for the mythic and historic worlds to come.

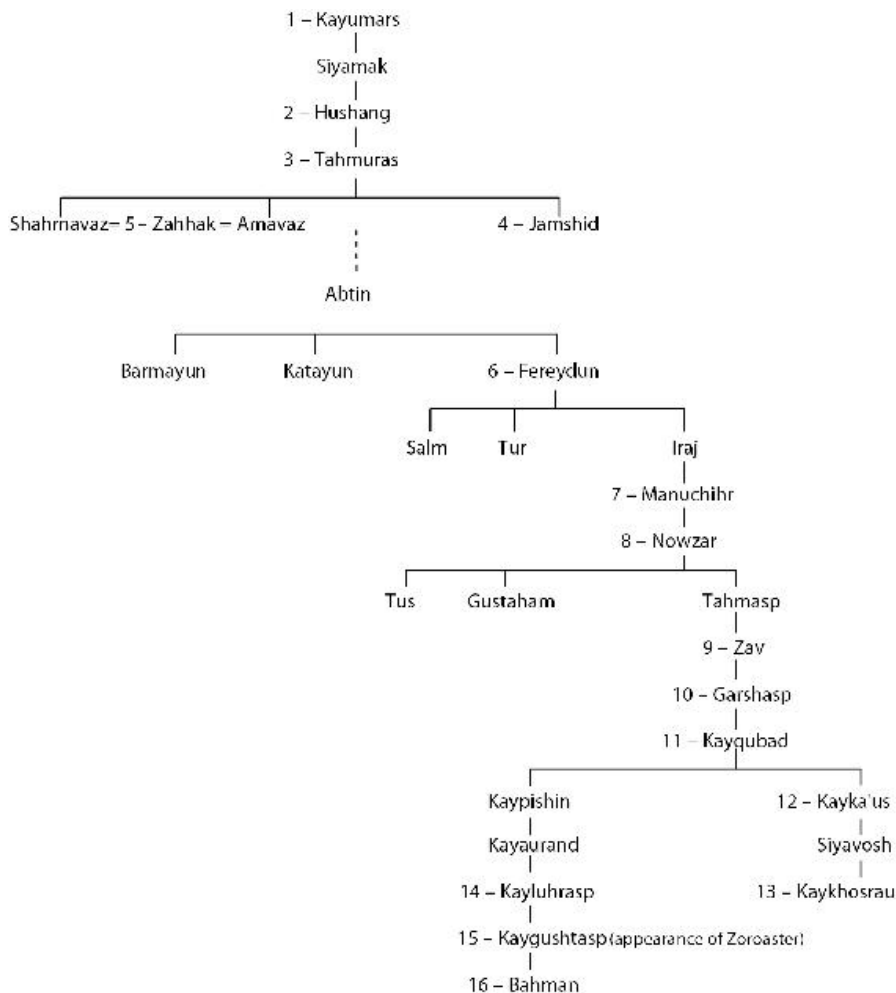


Table of Legendary Kings

THE FRAVASHIS

The *Fravashis* are the souls of the faithful. At any given time, there are as many *Fravashis* in the world as there are faithful individuals.²⁴

¹ For the creation of the *Spentas*, see *Bundahishn* I, 23–28; for the assignment of kingdoms to the *Spentas*, see Zaehner, 1956, p. 23.

² For the great Cosmic Year that lasts 12,000 years, see Zaehner, 1956, pp. 29–33; see also *Bundahishn* I, 17–18.

³ Some of these years are cosmic, some mythic, and some real. Therefore, neither the number of years, nor their duration, or the equality of the four parts should be taken literally.

⁴ For a discussion of the creation of the *Amesha Spentas*, see *Bundahishn* II, 9; III, 2, 4; XXX, 23.

⁵ Cf., *Bundahishn* VIII, 1–2; IX, 1–5; X, 1–4; a more detailed account is found in *Zad Sparam*, V–

XI; see also Zaehner, 1956, p. 46.

6 The words Mazda and Mazdian are derived from the Indo-European *mns-* (*mnaḥ* in Iranian). Both refer to thought and mind. Mazdian cosmology is a cosmology of what can be materialized through thought. In this cosmology, therefore, things are thought into existence.

7 *Bundahishn* I, 23, 25; VII, 3; XXX, 29; see also Boyce, 1975, p. 204.

8 For a discussion of *Aka Manah*, see Dhalla, pp. 91–92.

9 For aspects of *Vohu Manah*: grace, relation to paradise, and relation to cattle, see Dhalla, pp. 41–46; for his guardianship of fire and work, see Dhalla, pp. 164–165.

10 For Prophet Zoroaster's view of *Asha Vahsheta*, see Dhalla, pp. 46–55; for his defense against disease and relation to fire, see Dhalla, pp. 169–170. For a discussion of *drug*, see Dhalla, pp. 92–94.

11 *Bundahishn* I, 26; XXXI, 38; see also Boyce, 1975, p. 204.

12 For *Asha* in the sense of order in the universe, see Settegest, p. 62. See also the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* described further below.

13 *Bundahishn* XV; see also Boyce, 1975, p. 204.

14 For Prophet Zoroaster's view of *Spenta Armaiti*, see Dhalla, pp. 58–61; see also Dhalla, p. 171 for *Spenta Armaiti* as earth.

15 Nanavutty, 1999, pp. 63–67.

16 *Bundahishn* I, 26; XXVII, 24; XXX, 19, 29; see also Boyce, 1975, p. 204.

17 For the destructive aspect of *Aka Manah*, see *Bundahishn* XXVIII, 1–47; on the legions of *Aka Manah*, see Dhalla, pp. 257–277.

18 For a detailed discussion of creation, see Zaehner, 1975, pp. 249–258.

19 For Prophet Zoroaster's view of *Khshathra Vairya*, see Dhalla, pp. 55–58.

20 *Bundahishn* I, 1–28; XXX, 29; see also Boyce, 1975, p. 204.

21 *Bundahishn* I, 26; IX, 2; XXX, 29; see also Boyce, 1975, p. 204; for further discussion of *Haurvatat* and *Ameretat*, see Dhalla, pp. 191–192.

22 For a comprehensive study of the *Yazatas*, see Dhalla, pp. 173–231.

23 More information on the nature and function of the *Amesha Spentas* and the *Yazatas* will be provided further below in the context of the Sassanid revival of the faith.

24 For a discussion of *Fravashis* and their relation to sentient beings of good nature, as well as family and clan, see Dhalla, pp. 233–243.

THE MYTHIC AGE

KAYUMARS AND HIS DESCENDANTS

The Mythic Age in Iranian lore begins with Kayumars, the equivalent of the cosmic *Gayomart*. He is the first man and the first king of the mythic kingdom of Iran, centered on Pahlav, the seat of the *Kaiyanian* dynasty. Like *Gayomart*, he is distinguished from the other creatures by the *farr*, his symbol of legitimacy and divine power.

Under Jamshid, who ruled for seven hundred years, the *farr* encompassed both the secular and the spiritual domains. Following tradition, Jamshid launched a number of innovations, among them the division of people into artisans, merchants, priests, warriors, and tillers of the land.

The Battle Continues

The cosmic battle between *Vohu* and *Aka* moves into the realm of myth. The Pishdadian dynasty begins in earnest. But its prosperous kingdom is eventually undermined by evil Zahhak. The Kayanian dynasts use various strategies and finally overthrow the rule of evil Afrasiyab. They pass a united and well-organized kingdom to the mortals to move it in the direction of immortality.

Jamshid brought the full import of the *farr* under his control and used it to improve his own status as well as the living conditions of his subjects. With the assistance of the *divs*, he built magnificent palaces, and, to immortalize his eradication of death from the face of the earth, he inaugurated a glorious celebration, the *Nowruz* (new year).²⁵ In the end, however, *Ahriman*, through pride, led Jamshid to ruin so that the mighty king lost both his kingdom and his *farr*. The true losers, however, were the Iranian people, who had to tolerate a thousand years of the rule of Zahhak. Rather than a king, Zahhak was a human-consuming demon. The two snakes that protruded from his shoulders demanded the fresh brains of two youths daily. Eventually, Fereydun imprisoned Zahhak in Mount Damavand and returned prosperity to Iran.²⁶

Mythic *Farr* (see also Cosmic *Farr* and Historic *Farr*)

In the mythic world, the three cosmic forces appear as three lords: Mazda, Mithra, and Apam-Napat. Lord Mazda is the creator of everything. Lord Mithra is the sun god that propagates the essence of existence in incremental degrees throughout the creation of Mazda. Lord Apam-Napat, or the deity of the waters, protects and nourishes the creatures of Mazda while Mithra sinks in the ocean. These forces, and a myriad of related, lesser forces, are at the disposal of Kayumars, the mythical descendant of the cosmic *Gayomart*.¹

One of the germane roles of mythic *farr* is guidance of the descendants of

Kayumars in the affairs of a mythic kingdom centered on the city of Pahlav. It provides them with a preordained and sacred example of divine rulership. In this role, the *farr* serves as a mediator between the kings and *Vohu Manah* (perfect mind). It would assist the king, especially when he embarks upon epoch-making decisions, i.e., decisions that would affect the lives of Iranians throughout centuries. If the king follows the dictates of the *farr*, his kingdom prospers. Fereydu is a prime example of such an epoch-making monarch. By taking refuge in the power of *kin* (vengeance), he prevented the good and virtuous part of his kingdom from falling victim to destruction, stagnation, and desiccation. His *din* (religion, organization) policy guided Siyavosh and Kaykhosrau to recapture the spiritual unity that had been lost under Jamshid.

1 Cf., Soudavar, p. 94.

Seeds of *kin*

Fereydu, who ruled for five hundred years, inspired unity and might in the early stages of his rule, but sowed the seeds of discord and division in the latter part. Dividing the world inequitably among his sons, Tur, Salm, and Iraj, he sowed the seeds of jealousy among them so that the older sons murdered the youngest, Iraj.¹ The death of this innocent king sets off a series of wars among the descendants of Fereydu over the possession of the *farr*. The *Chihrdad* in the *Shahname* is devoted to this struggle.

1 For the genealogy of Tur, see *The Gathas*, 12–46.

THE STORY OF SIYAVOSH

The renovation age begins with the story of the birth and childhood of Siyavosh, followed by the story of his exile and martyrdom. This life story tells of how princes were brought up, groomed, and taught responsibility; of how seriously children felt about keeping a covenant with their father and their Creator; and of the feelings of Iran's first man to go into exile among Iran's enemies.

Son of Kayka'us and the grandson of Kayqubad, Siyavosh was born to the king of Iran by the daughter of a noble Turanian whose lineage included both Fereydu and Garsivaz, son of Pashang. She was found by Tus²⁷ and Giv²⁸ while they were hunting.²⁹ Their quarrel over her ownership brought the girl to the court of Kayka'us, where the king asked the girl about her lineage. She revealed her ancestry, which included Fereydu on her father's side and Garsivaz on her mother's side.³⁰

The champions' quarrel was settled by the king, who gave the girl to neither. Instead, he placed her in his own harem, where she gave birth to Siyavosh.

At the age of about seven, Siyavosh was entrusted to Rustam to be taught chivalry and the ethic of kings. Rustam took the child to Zabulistan and treated him as if he were his own son.³¹ In Zabulistan, Siyavosh learned riding, archery, and wrestling. He was also instructed in the fine arts of conversation, drinking, and

merry-making.

When Siyavosh was about twenty years of age, he returned to the court and was assigned his own quarters. For the next seven years, Kayka'us honored the youth, tested him, and, in time, bestowed the governorship of Quhistan upon him. Siyavosh remained in Quhistan until his mother died. He then returned to the court to mourn her death.

Learning about the return of Siyavosh, the ladies of the harem—sisters of the prince and wives of the king—asked their sire to send Siyavosh to them. The king obliged. He then asked Siyavosh to pay a visit to the harem and meet with his sisters and Sudabeh.³²

Siyavosh asked Kayka'us to exempt him from the visit, but Kayka'us persisted. When Siyavosh entered the harem, he met Sudabeh, his step-mother, who held him tightly in her arms for an unusually long period. Her close embrace disturbed the prince.³³

Joseph-like in mien, Siyavosh was endowed with outward as well as inner beauty. Recognizing Siyavosh's merit as a future king, Sudabeh, who had married Kayka'us for his power rather than for himself, tried to attract the prince to herself and marry him to her daughter. The prince refused. He said he would rather die than marry an enemy from Hamavaran.³⁴

Failing, the frustrated Sudabeh impudently offered herself to the prince. She apparently thought that by engaging the youth in an act for which he could be blackmailed, she would reach her goal. "I am yours," she said, "ready to fulfill all your desires."³⁵

The prince, refusing to soil his covenant with his father, resisted Sudabeh's temptations. Frustrated, Sudabeh accused him of having made lustful advances. She informed her husband that the prince had assaulted her and, pointing to scratches on her face, added that the prince had had the intention of raping her.³⁶

The prince, of course, denied the allegations, which placed Kayka'us in a quandary. Sudabeh, who continued to accuse the prince of rape, finally produced a stillborn child as proof of her accusations. Kayka'us took the matter to the assembly of the *mu'bad*s for advice. The assembly advised the king to ask both Siyavosh and Sudabeh to undergo the trial by fire.

Sudabeh refused. Siyavosh, on the other hand, accepted. On the next day, he rode his horse through a mountain of burning wood and emerged unblemished.³⁷

Wounded, Sudabeh recoiled and worked other magic to make life at the court difficult for the prince. The unwise Kayka'us, too, unwittingly stoked the feud by taking the case to the *mu'bad*s for a decision and by forcing Siyavosh to undergo trial by fire. This allowed Sudabeh to torment the innocent youth even more.

An opportunity for escape appeared when Afrasiyab, Iran's enemy to the east, threatened to cross the Oxus with a hundred thousand warriors.³⁸ As Kayka'us prepared to retaliate, the prince saw his chance to distance himself from Sudabeh and his own distrusting father. He volunteered to lead the army of Kayka'us against Turan.³⁹

Kayka'us accepted Siyavosh's proposal and put an army together for him.

Rustam was summoned to assist Siyavosh, and an army of 12,000 men from Pahlav, Pars, Kuch, Baluch, Gilan, and the plain of Saruch was assembled. Accompanied by his champions and five *mu'bad*s, Siyavosh headed for Zabulistan.

After a month in Zabulistan, Siyavosh and Rustam continued their march, having added armies from Zabulistan, Kabulistan, and India to the host. As the army advanced toward the plain of Herat (Hari), other notables joined the assembled force. Siyavosh assigned Zange-i Shavaran to command the newly-formed army, and he himself set out for Marvrud⁴⁰ and Taliqan.⁴¹

At Balkh, Siyavosh stormed all the gates with mighty armies. In spite of the efforts of Garsivaz in defending Balkh, the city fell after three days of fighting. Sipahram crossed the Oxus and returned to his king, Afrasiyab.

Siyavosh wrote a letter to Kayka'us and apprised him of his efforts to date. "In the course of a three-day battle," he wrote, "I conquered Balkh. Sipahram fled to the city of Tirmidh, and Barman, like an arrow shot, disappeared from sight."⁴² He then reported that the lands to the south of the Oxus were now his, and he asked the King's permission to conclude the war by crossing the river to Sughdia, where Afrasiyab ruled and kept his army.

Kayka'us cautioned Siyavosh against haste. He reminded the prince of Afrasiyab's vile and cunning nature: "You have won a battle against Afrasiyab," the king wrote in reply, "haste might well cause you to lose the war. Rather than rushing into a war, you must keep your army together and wait where you are. Let temptation work on Afrasiyab and make him cross the Oxus and meet you." Siyavosh remained on the southern shore of the Oxus.

On the other side of the Oxus, Afrasiyab was informed by Garsivaz that Siyavosh, Rustam, and a mighty host from Iran had stormed Balkh and captured the city. Their champions, Garsivaz explained, wielded maces with heads as large as the head of a buffalo, and they numbered fifty for each man Garsivaz could field.

Garsivaz's glorification of the enemy host provoked Afrasiyab's anger. He had Garsivaz removed from his presence, ordered a thousand of his lords to transform Sughd into a Chinese dreamland, and prepare a banquet for him.

After the banquet, Afrasiyab retired to his quarters, where the reality of the day's news descended upon him as a frightening dream in which he found his entourage and pavilion stranded in a desert teeming with vipers while vultures circled overhead. A violent wind blew his banner away, and streams of blood washed away his pavilion. He saw thousands of his warriors decapitated and strewn about the battlefield. Each warrior in the attacking Iranian army carried a spear with a severed head on it and carried a head tied to his saddle strap. A thousand warriors wearing black robes assailed and captured him, tied his hands, and took him to Kayka'us who, flanked by his very young son, mocked him. Upon seeing him, the prince sprang up and sliced Afrasiyab in two. The intensity of the dream woke Afrasiyab. His screams brought his courtiers, including Garsivaz, to his side.

Following Garsivaz's advice, Afrasiyab assembled his *mu'bad*s, swore them to secrecy, and paid them handsomely. Then he discussed the contents of his dream

with them. Trembling, the *mu'bad*s agreed to interpret Afrasiyab's dream on the condition that the result of their interpretation not be taken personally. Afrasiyab agreed. The *mu'bad*s then disclosed that the prince in Afrasiyab's dream was Siyavosh and that he would rout Turan if Afrasiyab were to continue his war with Iran. They further disclosed that, were Afrasiyab to kill Siyavosh, matters would become even worse: his death would lead to the annihilation of Turan.

The interpretation affected Afrasiyab greatly. To avoid further cause for vengeance, he assembled his champions, lords, and nobles the next morning to discuss the war with them. After much praise of his own past triumphs, he suggested that Turan should opt for peace. "After all," he said, "two-thirds of the world still belongs to me. Why not make it a tranquil one?"

After his advisors and nobles agreed to sign a treaty with Siyavosh, Afrasiyab sent a delegation, with appropriate gifts, to the Iranian prince. The delegation, headed by Garsivaz, offered to sign a peace treaty:

I do not set my face against Iran.
All from the bank of the Jihun to Chin
Is mine, my home is Sughd—a realm distinct.
In truth it is through Tur and Valiant Salm
That all the world is thus turned upside down,
And since the innocent Iraj was slain
Our warriors' brains have lost their wits. Iran
Is not divided from Turan, but wars
And feuds prevented friendship. Now I trust
That God will give good days and joyful news.
He raised thee from the country of Iran,
And giveth thee the friendship of the brave.
Let thy fair fortune dower the world with peace,
Let war and every evil disappear.
Now Garsiwaz hath come to add his wits
To thine, and as the valiant Faridun
Erst shared the world among his gallant sons,
So be it now [.] 43

A day's journey down the Oxus brought Garsivaz to Balkh, where he was royally received by Siyavosh. Garsivaz presented his gifts to the prince and Rustam and disclosed the terms of the treaty. Siyavosh presented the treaty to the war council, which, after weighing the pros and cons of Afrasiyab's offer, decided to accept the terms, provided that Afrasiyab offer a token of his goodwill as well.

Siyavosh's terms were stringent. They specified that the Turanian army withdraw from previously held Iranian territory in the Oxus region and that a hundred of Afrasiyab's relatives, named by Rustam, be sent as hostages to Iran. Afrasiyab frowned at the idea of sending his close relatives as hostages but, in the end, accepted the terms.⁴⁴

Elated with this easy victory, Siyavosh reciprocated Afrasiyab's kind gesture by sending the Turanian king many precious gifts. He also dispatched Rustam with a

A Silken Letter

I have defeated Afrasiyab and brought him to the negotiation table. He has accepted to pay war indemnities and send a hundred of his relatives as hostages to your court. I request permission to conclude the war.

Kayka'us rejected the peace treaty, informing Rustam that he wanted Afrasiyab dead. He further rebuked the national champion for having been duped by the guileful Afrasiyab. To the prince he wrote: "Prepare a huge bonfire and burn all the gifts sent by Afrasiyab. Send the hostages to Iran to be beheaded, ignore the treaty, and cross the Oxus immediately."

Rustam pleaded with Kayka'us to reconsider his order. He hoped that the king would not force the young prince to break his promise to the enemy. He reminded Kayka'us that Siyavosh had followed the king's orders and remained on the south shore of the Oxus. Besides, Rustam argued, breaking one's covenant was a cowardly act, an act against all the rules of chivalry that he had taught the prince. Nevertheless, Kayka'us did not heed Rustam's advice.

Kayka'us did not trust Afrasiyab. He felt that the demonic king had used magic to convince the gullible youth. "Would Afrasiyab care one bit," asked the king, "for the safety of his people in bondage?"[46](#)

Kayka'us then ordered Siyavosh to relinquish his command to Tus and return from Balkh. Siyavosh refused,[47](#) and by openly defying his father and his king, placed himself in a precarious situation. His position was further aggravated by his *farr* (i.e., the wisdom, intelligence, personal fortitude, and foresight of a man who would be king). Was it not his *farr* that had frightened Afrasiyab and brought him to the negotiation table? What was he to do?[48](#)

The night of decision, dark as the face of Ahriman, was before him. It refused to divulge what the next day would bring. But could it conceal the future from a man who carried the *farr*? Using his divine foresight, Siyavosh looked into his future and saw the final outcome, an outcome that, in the final analysis, spoke well for his decision to defect.

The next morning, Siyavosh summoned Bahram and Zange-i Shavaran and discussed the matter of relinquishing his command with them. "I am not happy at court," he said to the champions. "This was the reason I accepted this command in the first place. And I am not happy with my father's grandiose schemes to elevate himself at my expense."[49](#) I have a covenant with the Creator," Siyavosh continued, "a covenant compared to which my father's wishes pale."[50](#) All my experiences in this world have been painful ones. What the future brings cannot be different."[51](#) I have come to the conclusion," Siyavosh concluded, "that I have no alternative but to defect to the enemy. I am, therefore, relinquishing the command of this host to Bahram until the arrival of Tus. He is to put everything in order and hand the command down to Tus when the champion arrives. I also want Bahram to apprise Tus of the numbers, thrones, and treasures that are kept under the auspices of this command." Bahram was sorely troubled and Zanga, son of Shavaran, wept openly and cursed the country of Hamavaran.[52](#)

"As for you, Zange," the prince continued, "I would like you to accompany the

gifts and hostages from Turan back to Afrasiyab. While there, I would like you to represent me and tell Afrasiyab that I did not break my covenant with him. I defied my father and my king to protect you and your people. Allow me safe passage through Turan to a place where I can stay hidden from Kayka'us."53

Afrasiyab listened to Siyavosh's message carefully. He then summoned his commander-in-chief, Piran, and discussed Siyavosh's proposal with him in private. After considering Kayka'us's demise and Siyavosh's claim to the future rulership of Iran, Piran advised the king to admit the prince into Turan.54

Convinced of the possibility of a great future, Afrasiyab invited Siyavosh to Turan and assured him of his own support, as if he were his own son, as well as the support of his people.55

Encouraged by Afrasiyab's kind words, Siyavosh addressed his army, asking the commanders to heed Bahram. Then, he set forth to meet the envoys who had crossed the Oxus to conduct him and his private army into exile.56

The Turanians, especially Piran and his entourage of a thousand noblemen, welcomed the prince with the sound of kettledrums and gifts.57

On the way to Afrasiyab's court, Piran talked to the prince about his own feelings toward Afrasiyab and about the prince's future with him. "Afrasiyab," Piran said, "is like a father to you; he loves you dearly and, although the rest of the world might see him differently, Afrasiyab is wise, intelligent, and God fearing. I am one of his relatives, and I alone have a host of a hundred thousand warriors in these parts." Siyavosh's heart, however, was elsewhere. The farther they rode into Turan, the heavier his heart became.58

If Siyavosh had any reservations, the welcome that Afrasiyab gave the party erased them from his heart. The two hugged each other affectionately and kissed. They became great friends.59

Afrasiyab, however, continued to regard Siyavosh as his only sure avenue to the domination of the lands of the Kayanian dynasty and the elusive *farr*.60

Siyavosh accepted his fate as an exile in enemy territory. He accompanied the king on his hunting expeditions and, within a year, gained the respect of the Turanian army, married Jarireh, Piran's daughter, and settled down. A son, Farud, was born to them. Dictated by circumstances and encouraged by Piran, he also proposed to marry Farangis, Afrasiyab's daughter.

Piran encouraged his king to agree to the marriage. He foresaw the birth of Kaykhosrau and his unifying of Iran and Turan and made Afrasiyab aware of it:

"O king! Let not thy heart

Be grieved hereat. Those born to Siyawush

Will be possessed of wits, reserved, and shrewd.

Trust not what readers of the stars may say,

Deal with his case according to thy wisdom,

For from this noble pair a prince will spring,

Whose head will be exalted to the sun

As king both in Iran and in Turan.

Then those two kingdoms will repose from strife [.]” 61

Patiently arguing, Piran convinced Afrasiyab that a union between his family and the seed of Fereydun and of Kayka'us would ultimately heal the wounds of both war-torn lands. Afrasiyab finally agreed. Piran then dispatched Gulshahr, his consort wife, to Farangis to take her to the prince.⁶²

When the marriage ceremony between Siyavosh and Farangis was over and the festivities were at an end, Afrasiyab gave Siyavosh the rulership of the eastern provinces of Turan and invited him to settle wherever he pleased. Siyavosh built Siyavoshgird, near Khotan, and settled there.⁶³ It was a tranquil life for a while.

In the seclusion of Siyavoshgird, Siyavosh reviewed the past and thought about the events that had catapulted him into Turan. Guided by the *farr*, he arrived at a frightening conclusion. He foresaw that a war between Iran and Turan was inevitable and that Afrasiyab would murder him. He apprised Piran of his findings and concluded his ominous look into the future by telling Piran that after his death, Afrasiyab would suffer a great deal.

Piran did not believe Siyavosh. Within a week, however, a letter arrived. In it Afrasiyab commanded Piran to take his army and rush to the confines of the empire.⁶⁴

Siyavosh's premonitions proved correct. Gradually, Afrasiyab became concerned about Siyavosh's quick ascent to power. To obtain more information about the events in Siyavoshgird, he sent his brother, Garsivaz, there to gather information. He asked Garsivaz to spy on Siyavosh and report anything that struck him as unusual.

Garsivaz was jealous of Siyavosh and Farangis, and of Siyavosh's newborn son, Farud, by the daughter of Piran. Hoping that one day he would rule the beautiful Siyavoshgird himself, upon his return to Afrasiyab, he gave a damaging report on Siyavosh and his activities. In Garsivaz's report, references to Siyavosh's relations with Chin and Rum and his exchange of messengers with his father, Kayka'us, were emphasized.⁶⁵

Court intrigue reached new heights when Garsivaz was made the liaison between the palaces. He concocted events on both sides, and sowed discord far and wide. Garsivaz's reports made Afrasiyab, who was already in awe of Siyavosh, frightened of a day, in the near future, that Siyavosh would wrest Turan away from him.

It was distressing to Afrasiyab that Siyavosh should disregard his envoy, collude openly with Chin and Rum, and exchange information with Iran. Following Garsivaz's advice that he should not wait until it was too late, he moved his army to Khotan.⁶⁶ Upon hearing of this move, Siyavosh informed his pregnant wife, Farangis, of his own imminent death and foretold that sometime soon an Iranian champion would come and secretly take her and the child she carried to the Oxus River and to Iran. He even foresaw that their son would lead a mighty host and shake the world.⁶⁷ He also instructed his steed, Bihzad, to allow no one but the avenging Kaykhosrau to ride him.⁶⁸

Having completed his will and testament, Siyavosh killed all his other horses, burned his palaces with their untold riches, and rode Bihzad to meet Afrasiyab. In

the field, as his thousand Iranian warriors faced the army of Afrasiyab, Siyavosh ordered his commanders to refrain from fighting. He was captured by Afrasiyab, who turned him over to Gorvy to be slain on the roadside.

Despite her efforts, Farangis could not reach her father. Afrasiyab ordered Gorvy to take Siyavosh to a fort high in the mountains and, away from Farangis, behead him. [60](#) Gorvy followed his master's orders.

The Blood of Siyavosh

When he was past the city and the host
They bore and dragged him bound upon the plain,
And then Gurwi¹ received from Garsiwaz²
A blue-steel dagger for the bloody deed.
He dragged the prince on by the hair afoot
And when he came to where the mark had stood.

.....

Flung to the ground the mighty Elephant,
And showed no shame or reverence for rank,
But set a golden basin on the ground,
Turned up the prince's face as 'twere a sheep's
Cut off the silver Cypress' head and filled
The bowl with blood. Gurwi took up the bowl
And emptied it where he had been commanded.
From that blood presently there sprang a plant,
Which I will teach thee how to recognise,
For it is called "The Blood of Siyawush."³

1 Gurwi is the same as Gorvy.

2 Garsiwaz is the same as Garsivaz.

3 Warner, vol. II, p. 321; Siyawush is the same as Siyavosh.

THE STORY OF KAYKHOSRAU

Upon his ascension to the throne of Iran, Kaykhosrau launched a program of reforms. With the assistance of the nobles and potentates, he rebuilt the cities devastated by the many assaults of the Turanian armies, destroyed the haunts of demons by expanding cultivation into the wastelands, and ushered in good will and trust. Before long, Iran regained the glory it had enjoyed under Jamshid and Fereydun and barred Ahriman from influencing affairs.[70](#)

Zal—the son of Sam and grandson of Nariman[71](#)—his son, Rustam, and the nobles of Kabulistan arrived in Iran and were welcomed by Giv, Gudarz, and Tus. The sight of Rustam, his father's mentor, moved Kaykhosrau and brought tears to his eyes. Rustam paid homage by kissing the ground before the king. The king praised Rustam profusely and called him the wise and serene mentor of Siyavosh.[72](#)

After a few days of rest and getting acquainted with all the visitors who had come to pay their respects and announce their support, the king set out on a hunting expedition. He requested that Rustam accompany him.[73](#) The hunt, however, served as a cover for the king's real intentions—a full-fledged survey of

the Iranian marches and of the devastated land. After this assessment, Kaykhosrau went on a spending spree. He ordered cities that had fallen on bad times to be refurbished and citizens who had lost their property to be reimbursed. The town-by-town inspection finally brought Kaykhosrau to Azerbaijan.⁷⁴ Here he visited the Azargashasp fire temple, where he prayed to the Creator.⁷⁵

On his way from Azerbaijan, Kaykhosrau visited Kayka'us. The two kings, each flanked by his champions, met and talked about the devastation that Afrasiyab had visited on the land.⁷⁶

Kaykhosrau swore by the Fire that he would be steadfast in his resolve and that nothing would distract him from avenging the death of his father, not even Afrasiyab's kinship to him.⁷⁷ As a token of his truthfulness, he made a solemn pledge to that effect and had it recorded in the Pahlavi language and witnessed by Rustam, Zal, and the other Iranian warriors.⁷⁸ Rustam was given the custody of the writ.⁷⁹

On the eve of his departure, Kaykhosrau visited the fire temple again and sought the Creator's support.⁸⁰ Then, he addressed the champions of Nimruz, Kabulistan, and Iran, who had all pledged to fight Afrasiyab at his side. "I have traveled," he said, "from Azargashasp to this place, and I have not seen one person who is happy or who is well off. I have not seen any cultivated lands. This will have to change. And if you are truthful about your pledge to me, it will change!" He then ordered a list to be prepared of all the princes, nobles, and champions so that they could pledge their support. The house of Kayka'us headed the list.⁸¹

The list is impressive. It reveals the structure of the military and shows how the various principalities in the kingdom contributed to the defense of Iran against Turan. Furthermore, reviewing the list, titles like king of kings, kings, and *satraps* find meaning in the intricate tapestry of ranks and numbers, revealing the hierarchy according to which society was organized and ruled.

The house of the king of kings, Kayka'us, contributed a hundred and ten commanders. Fariburz, son of Kayka'us, led these champions and their warriors. The house of Nawzar, led by Zarasp (son of Tus), contributed eighty champions; the house of Kishwad, led by Gudarz, contributed seventy-eight mountaineers and horsemen of the plains; the house of Gazhdaham, led by Gustaham, contributed sixty-three fighters. Other houses offered similar numbers of champions, horsemen, and fighters. Each house carried a distinctive banner. The house of Gudarz, for instance, carried the Kaviyan banner, representing the royal house. So numerous were the contributions that the *mu'bad* lost count.⁸²

Rather than mobilizing the army at once, the king gave a feast and bestowed wealth and titles on the prospective heroes. The defeat of Palashan, Afrasiyab's commander-in-chief, embodied the top prize.⁸³ Bizhan, the son of Giv, accepted the challenge. He also pledged to bring the crown of Afrasiyab to Kaykhosrau.

As the ceremonies continued, other champions entered the bidding. Giv accepted a challenge to set fire to a huge pile of wood that had been strategically placed in a gorge on the Kasseh Rud⁸⁴ to impede any assault on Afrasiyab's domain. The most difficult mission, however, was Gurgin's. He was to deliver

Kaykhosrau's challenge to Afrasiyab and bring back the Turanian's reply.⁸⁵ After all tasks were assigned and rewards bestowed, the king and Rustam talked further about the future.⁸⁶

Kaykhosrau was informed that a district near Zabulistan, now under Turanian control, had originally belonged to Iran. Since that land had much to offer in the way of elephants and precious stones, and since the people did not like the overlordship of the Turanians, Rustam suggested to the king to liberate that realm and annex it to Iran. This, Rustam thought, would be a considerable blow to the Turanians.

The king, recognizing the merit of the champion's strategy, suggested that since the land under discussion was contiguous to Zabulistan, the seat of Rustam, an army could be sent under the leadership of Faramarz, Rustam's son, to reduce that domain. Rustam accepted to send his son to annex the region.

TUS MARCHES ON TURAN

Equipped and ready for battle, the great army presented itself to the king. The king appointed Tus, a kindred of Nawzar, as the commander-in-chief. He advised the lower ranks to follow the commands of Tus, and he advised the aged warrior not to forsake his loyalty to his sovereign, to observe the law of the Creator, and to aid the farmer, the craftsman, and the businessman. Finally, he made it clear to the commander that the army should not go by way of Kalat, the seat of Siyavosh's other son, Farud.⁸⁷

Tus accepted the King's command.⁸⁸ However, when the army arrived at a fork in the road where one way led to the waterless desert and the other, passing Charam, provided good pastures and provision for the army at Mayam, against Kaykhosrau's advice, Tus chose the latter road. Gudarz reminded the general of the shah's desire that the army should follow the desert road and not approach Kalat, but Tus did not pay any attention to him. The army chiefs directed the host on the road to Charam.

Hearing about the approaching army, Farud brought his horses and livestock into his fort and shut the gate.⁸⁹ Then, following the advice of his mother, Jarireh, he rode with Takhar to the crest of the mountain to view the army, recognize its paladins, and introduce himself to them.

At the same time that Takhar was identifying the Iranian commanders for Farud, Tus spotted Farud and Takhar from the base of the mountain. He asked for a volunteer who could climb to the peak and deal with the two. If they are friends, he said, punish them. If they are foes, drag them to the camp, faces downward.⁹⁰

Bahram, from the house of Gudarz, volunteered to perform the task and, at the peak, asked the two to identify themselves. Farud identified himself as the son of Siyavosh and the brother of the king. Then, showing Bahram his royal birthmark, Farud added that he wished to meet Bahram and some of the other Iranian commanders so that he could bestow gifts upon them. "It is my wish," Farud added

further, “to ride with the army of Iran and participate in the revenge of the death of my father.”

Bahram, in turn, introduced himself and paid homage to the prince. In response to Farud’s request to join the Iranian army to seek revenge for his father, Bahram was skeptical, given the political situation that obtained in Iran at the time. The major problem, Bahram explained, was that Tus considered Kaykhosrau a usurper. For the same reason, he might not welcome the king’s half-brother.⁹¹

When, at the end of their meeting, Bahram was ready to leave the peak to take Farud’s message to Tus, he gave the prince some advice. “My prince,” he said, “if Tus sends anyone other than myself to this peak, it means that he intends to wage war against you. Retire to your stronghold and fortify it as best as you can.”

Back in the Iranian camp, Bahram apprised Tus of the identity of the warriors and of the youth’s royal lineage. Tus became angry.⁹² Discrediting Bahram by attributing his loyalty to the *farr* to egoism, he asked for another volunteer who would climb the mountain and decapitate the bold “Turk.” Riv, Tus’ son-in-law, accepted the challenge. On the mountain, Farud tried to discourage the Iranian warrior by shooting at his horse, but Riv continued to climb on foot; Farud then shot him dead with one arrow. Tus sent Zarasp, his own son and Riv’s brother-in-law. Farud killed him as well.

Seeing how his warriors fell before Farud, Tus took to the saddle himself and headed for the peak. Takhar advised Farud not to stay and fight. “My prince,” he said, “you are not a match for the mighty Tus. We must return to the fortification and find a way to defend ourselves.” Farud, however, remained on the peak to battle Tus. “If you do not wish to return to the fort,” Takhar pleaded, “then kill Tus’s horse. Princes are not likely to fight when they lose their steed.” Farud followed Takhar’s direction and killed Tus’s horse. As predicted, the loss of his horse stopped Tus’s advance up the mountain. Tus returned to the army disheveled and confused. Giv then accepted the challenge. Takhar identified Giv as Iran’s strongest and most astute warrior and told Farud how Giv had found Kaykhosrau in Turan and brought him back to Iran.⁹³

Farud treated Giv in the same way that he had the others. He forced the warrior to return to the Iranian camp, as Tus had, to be ridiculed. In the case of Giv, the return was painful. He had to confront not only the other warriors, but also his own son, Bizhan. The latter was now determined to take on the “Turk” at all costs and avenge his brother Zarasp. He would not listen to anyone, not even to Gustaham.⁹⁴

Recognizing the invincibility of Bizhan, Farud decided to return and shut himself up in the fort. Bizhan pursued him. Before Farud reached the fort, Bizhan killed Farud’s horse, injured Farud’s back, and incapacitated his arm. Farud ordered his warriors to stay in the fort and keep the gate securely shut.

Bizhan’s feat had opened the pass to the Iranian army. Tus then swore to kill the “Turk” and avenge the death of his son, the valiant Zarasp.⁹⁵

That night Jarireh, Farud’s mother, had a terrifying dream. In her dream she saw a blaze engulf the entire Sepid Kuh (white mountain), consuming the fort and

its inhabitants. When she awoke from this nightmare, she went to the window of her apartment to view the mountain and the surrounding countryside. The whole place was filled with Iranian troops. This further discouraged her. She knew that the end had come and that the wounded Farud and his warriors were no match for the Iranian army. Taking matters into her own hands, she made sure that none of the fort's wealth passed into the hands of the Iranian looters.

To carry out this plan, she mutilated and killed all the Arabian horses in the stables and set the fort ablaze. This done, she went to her mortally wounded son's apartment and killed him in his sleep. She then killed herself.

Three days after the capture of Farud's fort on Sepid Kuh, the Iranian army resumed its march on Turan. On their way they slew all the Turanians they met and left their bodies on the road as examples. Finally, they reached the Kasseh Rud.

On the Turanian side, Afrasiyab re-appointed Piran his commander-in-chief and asked him to immediately gather troops from all over Turan to fight the Iranians who were, at the time, impeded by a snowstorm.

The Iranians were baffled by the intensity of the cold and the amount of snow. Bahram attributed the storm to the wrath of the Creator for the death of Farud.⁹⁶

On the eighth day, Tus assembled his warriors. He asked Giv to make good on his promise, for which he had received a generous reward from the king, and set fire to the pile of wood placed strategically in a gorge by the Turanians to obstruct the movement of the Iranian army into Turan. In spite of Bizhan's offer to carry out the task for him, the aged Giv rode past Kasseh Rud and set the obstacle ablaze. The wall of wood burned for three weeks. On the fourth week, the Iranian army continued its march to Garugard, sending contingents out to scout the countryside.

Garugard was the seat of the Iranian Tazhav, who had defected to Turan. He held the territory to the north of the Oxus, the grazing ground for Afrasiyab's livestock.

Tazhav dispatched Afrasiyab's shepherd, Kabudah, to assess the strength of the Iranian army and bring him news of the Iranian host. When Kabudah failed to return, Tazhav decided to approach the Iranian camp personally and secure the necessary information.⁹⁷

Giv tried to persuade the traitor to go to Tus and beg forgiveness, but Tazhav refused to denounce Afrasiyab and pay allegiance to the king of Iran. Instead, he fled from Giv, taking his beautiful slave girl, Spanvi, with him. When the girl proved to be too heavy for his horse, he abandoned her on the road and continued his trek to Afrasiyab.⁹⁸

After Afrasiyab received Tazhav and heard him out, he rebuked Piran for having ignored his orders to mobilize an army. He commanded the aged warrior to stop procrastinating and assemble the border guards and meet Tus with a mighty army. Piran obeyed his king's behest and mobilized a mighty force. He planned to reach the Iranians by taking a shortcut through uncharted territories.⁹⁹

Piran's decision was based on intelligence from Tazhav to the effect that the Iranian army spent most of its time merrymaking and that it did not expect to be

attacked any time soon. This correct assessment gave Piran the edge and, in the battle that followed, many Iranian warriors fell.¹⁰⁰

Having inflicted yet another misfortune on Iran, Tus's ability to command the army came into question. The Iranian generals at once asked for his ouster and dispatched a messenger to Kaykhosrau to apprise him of the state of things between Iran and Turan.

Tus's treatment of Farud and the news of the army's defeat at the hand of Afrasiyab infuriated the king. Summoning the scribe, Kaykhosrau dictated a letter to be delivered to Fariburz. In the letter, he removed Tus from command and appointed Fariburz in his place.

Upon his return to the court, Tus was further humiliated by Kaykhosrau in front of his peers. Pronounced unfit for royal service and for royal company, Tus was banished to his estate, where he was to spend the rest of his days.

Upon assuming command of the army, Prince Fariburz dispatched Ruhham to Piran with a message and a complaint that he should mount a night attack rather than fight in the open.¹⁰¹

Ruhham was well received by the Turanians. After listening carefully to Fariburz's views on the war, Piran said that it was the Iranians who had started the aggression against the Turanians and not the other way around. Furthermore, he made it clear that he understood the dilemma that Tus's unwise decisions had created for the Iranians. To the new commander of the Iranian army, therefore, Piran offered one month's respite to decide whether he wished to continue the hostilities or sign a peace treaty with Turan.¹⁰²

Fariburz decided to continue the war, and the two armies fought a number of battles. In the decisive battle, the Turanians succeeded in cornering Fariburz, the mainstay of the Iranian army; they even killed Riv, Kayka'us's son. Only the bravery of Bahram, who snatched the fallen prince's crown, saved Iran from even more shame.¹⁰³

In the course of the day, the Iranian army was greatly reduced in number, and by day's end it began a retreat. The Turanians rejoiced.¹⁰⁴

To celebrate Piran's victory, Afrasiyab summoned the old warrior to his capital and entertained him and his men for two weeks. Then he presented Piran with some of the most precious pieces in his treasury and advised him to keep a lookout in the direction of Iran. Although gone for now, Afrasiyab warned, the Iranians were not gone forever. Kaykhosrau, he said, was wealthy and could change the minds of his champions easily. He advised Piran, therefore, to appoint spies who could apprise Turan of activities in Iran.

Piran listened attentively, and when the king's words were finished, he and his champions left for China to seek assistance from the Chinese against the invader from the west.

Kamus the Kushan

The defeat of the Iranians in Turan brought Rustam, Iran's national champion, into the war. He entered as a mystery paladin.¹⁰⁵ Piran, through experience, was aware of the might of Rustam and worried that the mystery paladin might be Rustam. Kamus the Kushan, however, was not impressed. "I shall not despair," he said, "I will not tremble even if Kaykhosrau himself enters the battlefield."¹⁰⁶

Rustam had chosen to enter the field at the beginning of the war as a mystery paladin who fought on foot. His intention was to lure the Turanian champions out and kill them off one by one. His first encounter was with the Turanian champion Ashkabus. Seeing the opponent on foot, Ashkabus laughed and asked the champion to identify himself. Rustam did not identify himself. He merely said he had entered the fight to take Ashkabus's horse from him and teach him a lesson in fighting on foot. When Ashkabus sped up his horse to run Rustam down, Rustam shot Ashkabus's horse dead with his first arrow. Ashkabus got up quickly and showered Rustam with arrows. Rustam's first shot passed through Ashkabus's coat of mail and killed him instantly. Rustam's arrow was the size of a javelin.

"Who is this Sagzi?" Kamus wanted to know. "What does he look like? What words does he use in his opening statement on the day of battle? What tactics must I know were I to face this Rustam?"

"For your sake," said Piran, "I hope you will never have to face the Sagzi. On many occasions, even Afrasiyab has had difficulty coping with him.¹⁰⁷ He is Iran's national hero, devoted entirely to Kaykhosrau. He is quick in reaching for the sword and fights to avenge Siyavosh, whom he had brought up like a son and whom Afrasiyab has killed."

The next challenger was Kamus, who rode out the next day and challenged the mystery paladin. Rustam walked out into the open carrying a heavy mace and a noose. The two exchanged routine opening remarks and engaged each other in single combat. Kamus reached for his sword to decapitate Rustam, but failed. Rustam, on the other hand, caught the Turanian's midsection in his noose. Kamus struggled to free himself but, after a while, lost consciousness and fell off his horse. Rustam tied Kamus's hands up and brought him to the Iranian camp. He threw Kamus at the feet of the Iranian warriors and told them they could do with him anything they pleased. The Iranians tore Kamus's body to pieces.

The Khaqan of China

With the death of Kamus, the Turanian army was plunged into disarray. No one believed that the Kushani champion could be eliminated so easily. Questions regarding the identity of the mystery paladin were on every tongue. The Khaqan was warned that the Turanians would refuse to fight as long as the Iranian paladin's identity was not known.

As Rustam's strategy continued to work for Iran, chaos plagued the Turanian ranks. The Khaqan took it upon himself to learn the identity of the paladin by sending his best champion, Changosh, to the battlefield. Changosh faced the same fate as Ashkabus and Kamus before him. The identity of the Iranian champion

remained a mystery.

Eventually, the Turanians arranged a meeting with the mystery paladin to learn about his demands. Rustam named Garsivaz as the main cause of the bloodshed. He wanted Turan to hand him, as well as Gorvy of Zereh and his son, and the house of Viseh, over to the Iranians to try them. "If Turanians deliver these individuals to me," Rustam said, "I shall cease hostility against Turan. Otherwise, you will receive more of the same treatment."

Desperate to put an end to the war, Piran thought a face-to-face conversation with Rustam might solve the problem. Their amicable conversation, however, soon ended in disagreement. Piran's words did not strike Rustam favorably. "I considered you an upright Turanian," Rustam said. "Besides, I thought you would appreciate my solution for ceasing hostilities. Are we not talking about a murdered king? If you wish the hostility to be settled with bows and arrows, so be it!"

With negotiations at an impasse, Shangol of India moved into position and challenged Rustam. Rustam rode Rakhsh close to Shangol and identified himself to the Indian king as Rustam of Zabul. He reproached Shangol for referring to him as the Sagzi and not calling him by his given name. He then attacked Shangol with his javelin, lifted the king from his horse, and threw him to the ground. Shangol was stunned for a moment, but quickly reached for his horse and escaped.

When the victorious Iranian army returned from Turan, a proud Kaykhosrau received his champions at Pahlav. Upon seeing the king's crown, Rustam dismounted and paid his respects. The king embraced the paladin, praised his valor, and led him to the royal pavilion. The other champions followed. In the pavilion, the king placed himself on the throne with Rustam at his right. The other champions assumed their places according to protocol. Throughout the night, they talked about the war and about Rustam's defeat of the various foes.

Rustam spent the next month at court. He then asked permission to travel to Zabul to visit his aged father, Zal. The king gave his permission and, when the champion's entourage headed for Zabulistan, he showered Rustam with precious gifts.

Piran of Viseh

Defeated, Afrasiyab assembled his counselors, commanders, and champions and said, "What must be done is clear. Iran is on the ascendancy and we have weak borders. To assure the security of the east, we must take the combined forces of Turan and China to the western border. This army will assure the security of the east. Once there," Afrasiyab continued, "the Turanian army should cross the Oxus and fight Rustam and Giv in Iran." The assembly agreed.

Happy with the outcome, Afrasiyab sent letters to the Faghfur, to the king of Khotan, and to other rulers sympathetic to his cause. Within two weeks, a large army assembled in Khallukh. Afrasiyab opened the treasures of Turan, accumulated since the time of Tur, and gave out untold sums for arms for a mighty army. He even allowed his wild horses to be tamed and trained for service in battle. When all was ready, he divided his forces as follows:

1. 5,000 warriors were assigned to Shideh, Afrasiyab's son, to guard the marches of Khwarazm.
2. 5,000 Chinese troops were assigned to Piran to cross the Oxus and establish a Turanian kingdom in Iran, a kingdom superior to that of the young shah. Piran was warned against any conciliation with Iran.
3. The rest of the army he kept with himself in Khallukh country.

When news reached Kaykhosrau that the Turanian armies had occupied the upper and lower Oxus, he assembled his champions and directed them to select 300,000 warriors from India, Rum, and Arabia and to prepare to march on Turan within the next forty days.¹⁰⁸ Hardly two weeks after the announcement, the whole country had responded. Large numbers of commanders and nobles flooded the capital. Like Afrasiyab, Kaykhosrau opened his treasury to the army and equipped it well. When ready, he divided his forces as follows:

1. Rustam, with 30,000 choice warriors, was commissioned to capture India, Kashmir, and Kabulistan.¹⁰⁹
2. Luhrasp, of the Kayanian line, was assigned the marches of Alan [an] and Ghuzz Dizh on the Caspian to check the movement of the Slav and Rus, who might aid Shideh in Khwarazm.
3. Ashkash, with 30,000 troops, was commissioned to engage Shideh and capture Khwarazm.
4. Gudarz, son of Kishwad, was assigned the main army and was asked to march on Turan by way of the ford at Tirmidh. Gudarz's army included the troops of Zange, Gustaham, Shidush, Farhad, Kharrad, Giv, Guraza, and Ruhham.

When the main army was ready to pull out of Pahlav, the king said goodbye to the aged Gudarz. "Fight only when necessary," the king advised. "Rather than thinking of yourself, as was the case with Tus, think about the outcome of your deeds; respect the rights of people whose lands you cross; send a wise man to Piran, reason with him, see if he can be brought within the fold, and pray to the Creator for victory."

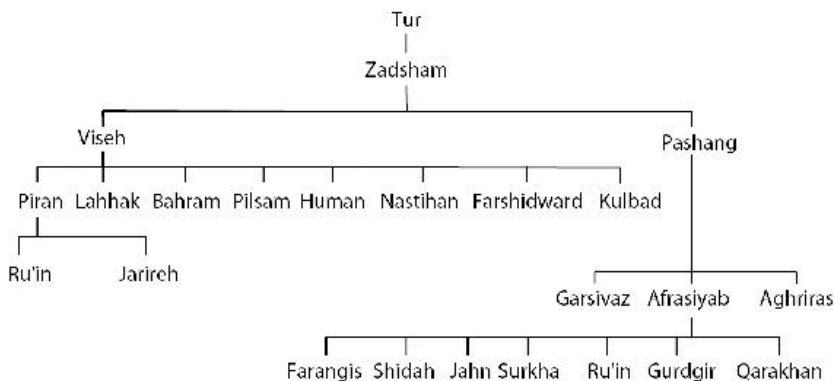
For days, the armies of Iran and Turan had faced each other, but neither commander would allow his army to take the initiative and start the fight. At last, Piran proposed that to decrease the degree of frustration among the soldiers, ten Iranian and ten Turanian warriors engage in mortal combat. Furthermore, he proposed that the heads of the armies, too, should face each other in single combat. The winner of the single combat would be accepted as the commander of both armies. Gudarz, who had always wanted to have the opportunity to fight Piran in exactly such a situation, accepted the terms. The following warriors faced each other in mortal combat. The result of the combat appears in the right-most column:

Turan	Iran	Result
Gorvy	Giv	Gorvy was captured
Kulbad	Fariburz	Kulbad (Piran's brother) killed
Barman	Runham	Barman (Piran's brother) killed
Siyamak	Gorazeh	Siyamak killed
Andariman	Gurgin	Andariman killed
Ru'in	Bizhan	Ru'in (Piran's only son) killed
Zangaleh	Faruhal	Zangaleh killed
Ukhast	Zange	Ukhast killed
Kahram	Bartah	Kahram killed
Sepahram	Hazhir	Sepahram killed

The Piran that faced Gudarz for single combat was far from the Piran of yesterday. Having lost all his men, including two of his brothers and his only son, he felt alone and insecure. Gudarz, on the other hand, boasted of the support of a victorious army. "Give up the fight and let me take you to Kaykhosrau alive," Gudarz advised Piran after the latter received his first decisive blow. The wounded Piran refused. Instead, he tried to kill the Iranian commander with his javelin. He succeeded only in injuring him. Gudarz, in turn, threw his spear at Piran and killed him.

When Kaykhosrau finally arrived at Gudarz's camp and his pavilion was erected, he saw Piran's body among the Turanian dead. He instructed that Piran, to whom he owed a great deal, be given a royal funeral.

He further instructed that Gorvy, the murderer of Siyavosh, be cut up, limb by limb. "Decapitate him like a sheep," the king ordered. "As for the army of Turan," Kaykhosrau said, "I forgive them all as long as they swear to follow my decrees and fight for Iran



The House of Tur

Piran

Piran is one of the truly tragic characters in the *Shahname*. While there is no question regarding his loyalty to Afrasiyab, he is similarly dedicated to Kaykhosrau and the cause of Iran: unification of the two lands. He prefers a united Turan to which Iranians also contribute as opposed to a united Iran in which Turanians lose their identity. It was with this intention that he brought Siyavosh to Turan, assisted Prince Kaykhosrau to ascend the Iranian throne, and commanded Afrasiyab's armies. Additionally, the house of Piran was the bulwark upon which the rulership of Afrasiyab had been established. Piran, his brothers, and his son had fought valiantly in many wars to keep Turan victorious, but, in the end, they were sacrificed for Afrasiyab's relentless pursuit of the *farr*. Without Piran and his support, Afrasiyab had no alternative but to flee before the *farr* of Kaykhosrau.

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THE GREAT WAR OF KAYKHOSRAU

With Piran dead and his house overthrown, Kaykhosrau moved his army into the field. He held court, summoned his victorious commanders from the marches, and sent letters to the rulers of the world for assistance.¹¹⁰

Kaykhosrau's Policy

Kaykhosrau's massive army dislodged Afrasiyab from Gang Dezh and forced him to take refuge in caves and rivers. Eventually, however, both Afrasiyab and his brother, Garsivaz, were brought to justice and executed. Their demise put an end to Ahriman's claim to the *farr*. What Fereydun had torn asunder through a policy of *kin* was now restored by Kaykhosrau through a policy of *din*.

In Pars, thankful to have had the wise Kaykhosrau, who had avenged Siyavosh and restored justice among the kings and nobles of all lands, as his grandson, Kayka'us died at the age of one hundred and fifty. As for Kaykhosrau, he retired into seclusion not to be seen for the next forty days. When the wake for Kayka'us

was over, Kaykhosrau sat upon his throne and addressed his people. "I have conquered all the corners of the known earth," he said, "and have expanded the kingdom of the Almighty as far as one is able. There is nothing more for me to do":

The Shah's great soul became solicitous
About God's dealings and his own high state:
He said: "From Hind and Chin to Rum each place
Is prosperous; withal, from west to east,
Mount, desert, land, and sea have I made void
Of foes; the rule and throne of might are mine;
The world no longer dreadeth enemies.
Full many a day hath passed above my head,
And I have gained from God my full desire,
Besides the vengeance that I had at heart,
Yet let me not grow arrogant of soul,
Corrupt in thought, an Ahriman in faith,
And be an evil-doer like Zahhak,
Jamshid, or such an one as Tur or Salm.
Sprung from Kaus on one side, on the other
Sprung from Turan—all rancour and vainglory—
I, like Kaus and like Afrasiyab,
That warlock froward even in his dreams,
May grow an ingrate unawares to God,
And fray mine own pure soul. His Grace will quit me,
I shall incline to falsehood and unwisdom,
And when I pass within the gloom, and when
My head and diadem shall come to dust,
I shall but leave a bad name in the world,
And make an evil ending in God's sight.
This face of mine, this colour of my cheeks
Will fade, my bones be clad in dust, and all
Accomplishment be lost. Ingratitude
Will come instead, and in the other world
My soul be dark. Another will assume
My crown and throne, and tread my fortune down.
A bad name will be my memorial;
The roses of mine ancient toils will turn
To thorns. Since now I have avenged my sire,
And have adorned the world with goodliness,
Have slain who should be slain, because they were
Perverse and hostile to all holy God,
No place remaineth—settlement or desert—
That hath not read the legend on my sword;
While all the mighty of the world obey me
Albeit they be monarches throned and crowned.

Thanks be to God who gave to me the Grace,
With feet and wings amid the change of fortune.
And now I deem it better to depart
To God in all my glory, and perchance
The Almighty's messenger may, though unseen,
And while I still am flourishing, convey
My spirit to the dwelling of the just,
Because this Kaian crown and throne will pass.
None will excel me in success and fame,
In greatness, welfare, peace, and revelry,
For I have heard and witnessed this world's secrets,
Its good and ill both privy and apert;
But still for husbandman and king alike
There is a common end—the way to death.¹¹¹

Having concluded his speech, he ordered the chamberlain to lock the door and turn away those who sought his audience. For the next week, Kaykhosrau remained in seclusion, praying to Yazdan, pleading with Him to keep evil away from him so that he would not follow the way of the fallen: Zahhak, Jamshid, and Kayka'us.

A week later, amid the consternation of his champions and nobles, Kaykhosrau returned to the throne room only to announce that he intended to continue his prayers and seclusion. He asked all present to do the same and left strict orders not to be disturbed either by the royal court or by the general public.

A week after that, the Iranian champions, greatly dismayed, assembled at court to decide on a course of action for the future of Iran. It was decided that Giv should go to Rustam in Zabulistan and that another messenger should be dispatched to Kabulistan for aid. The nobles of these lands must be told, the champions concluded, that Kaykhosrau has chosen the company of Ahriman. "We are afraid," said the champions in their message, "that Ahriman may lead our great King astray in the same way that he led Kayka'us away from the right path. We urge you," the message concluded, "to bring with you the astrologers of Kabulistan, the wisemen of Zabulistan, and all the savants of Qinnauj, Danbar, Murq, and May."

Rustam and Zal received the messenger graciously and complied with the order of the assembly. As soon as the astrologers, the wisemen, and the savants reached Zabul, the entire body set out for Iran.

Having concluded another week in seclusion, Kaykhosrau appeared before the assembly to discuss his situation. Refusing to sit in their places as protocol required, the champions addressed the King from where they stood. They wondered if their actions had triggered the stance that the King had chosen for dealing with matters of state.

"It is not that I do not need your help," said the King, "but that at present I cannot involve myself in matters of state. Our land is secure. Our troops need not be mobilized. My problem is personal. I have set myself a task that requires my

undivided attention. As soon as I have reached my goal, I shall discuss everything with you. For the present, however, I wish you well and bid you to return to your homes."

When the champions were gone, Kaykhosrau ordered the chamberlain to resume the seclusion procedures and returned to his chambers to pray. "You have created the universe," he prayed, "and You have kindled the light of benevolence, justice, and love in this world. What benefit would I draw from this kingship, if You are not pleased with me? Assess my good and evil and, if worthy, accept me to paradise."

For the next five weeks, Kaykhosrau remained in prayer. His body could no longer tolerate lack of sleep. His mental abilities, however, kept the vigil until he met Sorush. Sorush's message was simple: If you wish to reach heaven, you must abandon all involvement with your terrestrial existence. Appoint a just overseer for your kingdom and depart.

Sorush's departure woke the King. He praised God and, soon after, met with his champions to discuss the future.

"I have decided to step down as your king," he announced. "In seclusion, I met the auspicious Sorush. He tells me that it is time for me to depart. My days of crown, throne, and belt are over.¹¹²

Zal praised the King and pledged his allegiance. "This," Zal said, "is not my pledge alone, but the pledge of the peoples of kingdoms as far as Qinnauj, Danbar, Murq, and May. We all feel that throughout history, no King has ruled Iran as well as you or has possessed your benevolence and eminence."

Kaykhosrau thanked Zal and others for their support and concern. "As I told you earlier," said the King, "my problem was personal. It took me five weeks of constant vigil and supplication until, last night, Sorush finally blessed me with an answer. There is an end to everything, including kingship. And, there is a time when the concerns of a kingdom become secondary to the greater good. For this reason, I have decided to step aside and allow a new king to continue the rulership of Iran."

The King's decision came upon the Iranians like a bolt from the sky. Zal questioned the King's wisdom. "The King is not himself," he said. "Is this the King speaking," he asked, "or is this Ahriman? Fereydun and Hushang were great kings; they did not abandon their kingdom and seek seclusion!"

"Great King," said Zal, addressing Kaykhosrau, "my conviction requires that I relate some history that might not be pleasant, but, so far as the telling of this history might bring about a change in your decision, I feel compelled to tell it. You are a Turanian by birth and you grew up in Turan. The involvement in magic of your maternal grandfather, Afrasiyab, is well known. Your other grandfather, Kayka'us, is not any different. A kingdom stretching the face of the earth from east to west could not content him. He had to travel in the sky so he could count the stars. Ancestry, however, is not the only measure of a man's status. As king, you have contributed greatly to the well-being of this land. In the war with the Pechenegs, you showed great chivalry before Khwarazm was reduced. And, had

Afrasiyab defeated you, Iran would have been naught but a bowl of dust. No one could have prevented him from enslaving all Iranians, men, women, and children. God helped you defeat that fiend and erase evil from the face of this earth."

"You might deem," continued Zal, "that the problems of Iran are solved, but that is a false impression. Leaving kingship to others at this crucial juncture will deprive Iran of its most reliable pillar of strength, and you of the *farr*. My advice is that you break away from Ahriman and allow wisdom to guide you to the Creator."¹¹³

Kaykhosrau responded with reserve. "I have listened carefully to the aged Zal," he said, "and I do not wish to dismay either him or Rustam, who has many times saved my life in battle. Yet I, too, must say what needs to be said. I praise Zal for being forthright in assessing the situation. His allegation that I have abandoned the Creator, however, is not correct. My very life flows from the Creator. My decision is based on my experience and wisdom. I have not, as Zal intimates, turned away from the path of wisdom. Now, let me put Zal straight in his understanding of who I am. First, regarding his assertion about my Turanian ancestry and his claim that no wise men were ever born in Turan. I am the son of Siyavosh, from the seed of Kayan. My grandfather is Kayka'us, whose wisdom and benevolence is recognized worldwide. True, my mother is the daughter of Afrasiyab. But we should not forget that Pashang sired Afrasiyab and that Pashang's grandfather was Fereyduin. I am not at all ashamed to be reminded of my genealogy. A whole world trembled at the feet of Afrasiyab. Second, Kayka'us's attempt to reach the stars should be evaluated in the context of kingship. Kings are required to deal with the extraordinary."¹¹⁴ Third, when I became king," Kaykhosrau went on, "there was only one black spot on my ancestry. I erased that black spot, and with that, I have expended my *raison d'être*. Remaining as your King, I feel, will give me cause to indulge in extravagance and traverse the route that Zahhak and Tur took—the road to Hell. I have been in prayer for five weeks. The Creator has accepted me. Where I intend to go, I have no need for an army, a crown, or a throne. I have to travel light." Then addressing Zal, he added, "interpret my intentions as you wish; nothing changes my course in the direction of the Creator."

Kaykhosrau's words affected Zal greatly. The old man blamed himself for his lack of insight and begged the King's forgiveness. "Perhaps," he said, "it is I who am being misled by Ahriman. I looked to the past for guidance; no king, to my knowledge, has chosen the path you are about to walk. I spoke out because I could not bear parting with my King."

Zal's words pleased Kaykhosrau. He held the aged warrior by the hand and placed him next to himself on the throne. "I know," said the King, "that your intentions were good. Now, I would like all champions to move their armies out of the city and set themselves up in pavilions in the country. Provide a palace for me as well."

When the camp was in order, the champions assembled and took their places before the king, according to protocol. Kaykhosrau addressed the assembly: "Great champions of Iran! You well know that only good and evil are eternal and that

everything else is ephemeral. We try hard; we gather riches and fame only to leave them for our enemy. For our struggle, however, there is a reward and a punishment. Of the kings of the past, all that remains today is a name. We know Hushang, Jamshid, and Kayka'us. They did some good, but in the end they are remembered for their oppression and evil deeds."

"I am an individual like them," Kaykhosrau continued. "I devoted my life to my people. Now I have reached a point where this world no longer sustains my interest. I have been given access to a domain that is greater than the crown of the Kayanian. I am ready to leave this kingdom. Before I go, however, I intend to bestow my lands, weapons, and treasures on the people of Iran. While I make a count of my properties, slaves, and animals and divide them equitably among you, I want you to stay in this camp for the next week; eat, drink, and have a good time."

While some warriors and nobles questioned the king's sanity, others followed his decree and spent the week as he wished. On the eighth day, the king ascended his throne in full regalia. The main treasure of the *khosraus*, known as the *Abad* chest, was open and waiting for his decree.

Kaykhosrau called Gudarz of the House of Kishwad. "Gudarz," he said, "there is a time for hoarding and a time for spending. I want you to travel the length and breadth of Iran and refurbish any house that has come to ruin and any water course that has been neglected or destroyed by Afrasiyab. I want you to find the orphans, the widows, the homeless, and the needy and invite them to share this treasure among themselves. If you find a city that has come to a disastrous end, or a temple of fire that needs repair and attendants, or old men who can no longer sustain themselves, I want you to dip into this *Bad Avard* treasure and help refurbish and rejuvenate them. And third, the *Arus* treasure, founded and enriched by Kayka'us, is now in the city of Tus. I want you to take charge of that treasure and divide it among Zal, Giv, and Rustam."

Having divested himself of the world, Kaykhosrau addressed the people of Iran. "My time has come," he said. "Ask me for what you want and I shall grant your wishes."

The champions were distressed. They did not know whom to follow in time of war. Zal, the most loyal of the champions, took the floor. "Your Majesty," he said, "it is appropriate that I speak frankly about Rustam and his contribution to the well being of the royal house. He is the champion who rescued Kayka'us when he was in fetters in Mazandaran, along with Gudarz and Tus. He killed the White Demon and he decapitated Sanjah. He sacrificed his son, Suhrab, to avenge Kayka'us and eliminated Kamus the Kushan. Now that the King has decided to leave the throne, what reward does he have for the hero?"

"The Creator," said the King, "more than anyone else will reward Rustam for his good deeds. For my part, I shall bestow upon Rustam the rulership of the territory of Nimruz." A proclamation was written, signed, and handed to Rustam. Along with this, he rewarded all those who were known to Rustam and who had contributed to his realm with silk garments, gold, silver, and a cup full of jewels.

It was then Gudarz's turn to defend his son, Giv. "Your Majesty," Gudarz said.

“Since the time of Manuchihr to Kayqubad and from the latter’s time until the Auspicious Rule, I have served this crown and throne. Of my total of seventy-eight sons and grandsons, only eight live. The rest have been martyred for the King and crown. My son Giv combed Turan for seven years, eating nothing but zebra’s flesh and wearing deer’s hide, until he accomplished his mission and brought the Shah back to Iran. Now that the King intends to leave the kingdom, what reward will this champion receive?”

The King praised Giv, whom he called his own double. “You underestimate the contributions of your warrior son,” said Kaykhosrau. “I bestow on Giv the rulership of Isfahan and Qum.” Addressing the Iranians, he then praised the deeds of Gudarz. He reminded all present of the sacrifices that the family of the warrior had made and asked everyone to respect and heed Gudarz.

After Gudarz, Tus stood up and addressed the King. “Your Majesty,” he said, “from among the champions assembled here, I am the only one from the line of Fereydun. I have served the throne since the time of Kayqubad. I commanded the army that was mandated to pursue the revenge of Siyavosh in the mountains of Hamavan, I did not abandon my command in the battle of Lavan, and I had the honor of being fettered with Kayka’us in Mazandaran. Now that His Majesty intends to leave the kingdom, what will become of me?”

The King told Tus that he would remain the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the ruler of Khorasan. An order to that effect was written up, signed, and handed to Tus with golden bracelets and belts.

Although the affairs of the realm were now in capable hands, Luhrasp had not yet been among those rewarded. The King asked Bizhan to summon Luhrasp. When Luhrasp arrived, Kaykhosrau stepped down from the throne, took the crown from his own head, and placed it on Luhrasp’s head. “Luhrasp,” he said to the consternation of all present, “you are now the Shah!”

Zal contested the ascension of Luhrasp. “Your Majesty,” he said, “we will accept dirt as king, were you to wish such, but how can a lowly man, who arrived in Iran upon one horse, become the king of the land? Had you not commissioned him to the battle of Alanan and had you not bestowed upon him an army and a banner, where would he be today? Who is this man? What is his ancestry? Did Your Majesty not see anyone among the present company better suited for the rulership of Iran?”

The Iranian army, too, echoed the sentiments of Zal and refused to carry out the mandate of a king whose rule was not sanctioned by the Creator, but Kaykhosrau continued to support Luhrasp. “Luhrasp,” he said, “is not who you think he is. He is the grandson of Hushang; he is wise and, more importantly, he carries the *farr*. Like me, he will fight evil and will inaugurate a just rule. Furthermore, Luhrasp’s son, Gushtasp, will bring a new day and a new age to the world. Heed my advice and follow his decrees.”¹¹⁵

Convinced of his mistake once again, Zal dipped his finger into the dust, passed it across his lips, and proclaimed Luhrasp the Shah of Iran. “We are ignorant, Your Majesty,” he apologized to the new king. “It takes a king to know the true genealogy

of another king." The new king accepted Zal's apology.

When the time for his departure arrived, Kaykhosrau spoke to his wives. He asked them to regard him as one who is already dead. The women did not wish to let him go. They cried as they pulled their hair, beseeching the King to take them along with him. Kaykhosrau calmed them. He then addressed Luhrasp: "These are the women of the court of the Kayanian," he said. "They are the mothers, daughters, and wives of kings. I trust their well being to you, and I wish to receive a good report on the day that you meet Siyavosh and me."

Luhrasp accepted the responsibility. Kaykhosrau's last advice to Luhrasp was one of humility and acceptance: "Rule justly and keep the interest of your subjects in mind. As soon as you feel that kingship no longer interests you, rather than trying to make it interesting, leave it and save your soul." Luhrasp kissed the ground before Kaykhosrau.

Zal, Rustam, Gudarz, Giv, Bizhan, Gustaham, Fariburz, and Tus accompanied Kaykhosrau on the first leg of his journey. The army followed. At every station, attempts were made to persuade the King to give up his intention and return to his kingdom, but Kaykhosrau was determined to leave. He assembled the *mu'bad*s and asked them to work for the final reunion. "I have a long way before me," he said, "a way which yields neither water nor grass. Only those endowed with the *farr* can walk this road and reach its end. For this reason, I feel it is in your best interest to return. Let me pass into my other realm alone."

Zal, Rustam, and the aged Gudarz heeded Kaykhosrau's admonition and returned. Tus, Giv, Bizhan, and Fariburz continued on the way. They went for a day and a night into the desert, until Kaykhosrau stopped at a fountain. "We shall stay here for the night," he said, "and we shall talk about the past. We will not be together much longer. As soon as the sun rises, Soroush will meet me and my journey will come to an end."

In the evening, the King washed in the fountain and said goodbye to the champions. "You must return now," he said, "before the sun rises from behind the mountain. At that time, a wind will blow, the intensity of which would uproot trees; a black cloud will cover the sky and blanket the ground with deep snow. You will not find your way back to Iran." The champions were not convinced. They stayed.

When the sun rose the next morning, the King disappeared into thin air. The search of the champions for Kaykhosrau took them deep into the desert, but they could not find a trace of their King anywhere. Disappointed, they returned to the fountain. "This is a pleasant place," Fariburz said. "Why not stay here for the night and take the news to the army tomorrow? It will, of course, be difficult to convince people of what we have seen—a living being walking to meet the Creator. On the other hand, who would doubt that Kaykhosrau was an extraordinary being!"

They had hardly finished their supper when the wind picked up and snow covered the ground. Soon the snow became intense, overwhelming the champions. One by one, they perished.

For three days, Rustam, Zal, and Gudarz waited on the mountain to meet the

returning champions. Not one came. “If the King has gone,” Gudarz wondered, “what could have happened to the rest?” Nobody had an answer. The stay was prolonged a week, until Gudarz was convinced that, once again, members of his house have been sacrificed for the house of Kayan and that he would never see Giv and Bizhan again.

Succumbing to the rule of the Creator, an unwilling Gudarz allowed himself to be brought down from the summit. He cried for the departure of his son, his King, and his companions while, along with the surviving champions, he pledged to spend the rest of his life at the threshold of King Luhrasp.

Luhrasp

The choice of Luhrasp as the successor to the mantle of a king who had united Iran and Turan was controversial. No one knew Luhrasp well and none of the champions was willing to support his rule. In his own defense, Kaykhosrau said, “Luhrasp, is not who you think he is. He is the grandson of Hushang; he is wise and he carries the *farr*. Like me, he will fight evil and will inaugurate a just rule. Luhrasp’s son, Gushtasp, will usher a new day and a new age to the world. Heed my advice and follow his decrees.”¹

1 Warner, vol. IV, p. 302.

APPEARANCE OF THE PROPHET ZOROASTER

After the disappearance of Kaykhosrau in the Pure Light, Luhrasp, the grandson of Kaypishin from the seed of Kayqubad, ascended to the throne. As the exchange between Zal and Kaykhosrau regarding Luhrasp’s ascension to the throne indicates, many of those present at the court were not supportive of Kaykhosrau’s choice. On the contrary, the Iranian champions looked upon Luhrasp as a relatively small player who had only recently been appointed governor of Alanan and overseer of the Ghuzz Fortress. The Iranian champions deemed those positions to be inferior compared to the position to which Kaykhosrau intended to elevate Luhrasp, i.e., the rulership of the united Iran and Turan. Besides, we should not forget that at court, and in the presence of the King, Zal only ceremonially conceded to Kaykhosrau’s wishes and supported Luhrasp; in reality, however, he regarded the King’s choice an affront to the House of Nairam, a House that had descended from Zahhak, on the one hand, and Jamshid, on the other hand. Predictably, therefore, at the beginning of Luhrasp’s rule, Zal, Rustam, and the rest of the champions of the House of Nairam left the capital for their own kingdom of Zabulistan.

From its very inception, Luhrasp’s rule was confronted with difficulties. The departure of Zal and his clan for Zabulistan was only one of the adversities that befell Luhrasp. His other difficulty was caused by the violent death of four of Iran’s best champions—Fariburz, Tus, Giv, and Bizhan. These were the champions who accompanied Kaykhosrau when he set out to meet Soroush. On the way back, they were caught in a violent storm and perished. The departure of the House of

Nairam, the death of these four major champions of the realm, and the conflict between Luhrasp and his son, Gushtasp, over the rulership of Iran adversely affected the country's standing in the world. Enemies from within and without were becoming sure that the end of the Kayanian dynasty was at hand.

Luhrasp had two sons, Zarir and Gushtasp. Ancient Iranian tradition dictated that at the end of his rule, the king should pass the scepter to one of his sons. Luhrasp, ignoring this tradition, tried to pass the kingship on to one of the grandsons of Kayka'us. He was not, however, able to carry out his plan, because his plan was detrimental to the interests of the valiant and headstrong prince Gushtasp. Gushtasp insisted that the kingship of Iran was his by divine right. In the long run, Luhrasp agreed with his son and retired to the Nowbahar Fire temple, where he became a recluse. The Iranians hoped that the new king, after reconciling the differences between the two houses, would return the House of Nairam to serve at the behest of the kings of the Kayanian dynasty.

The importance of the kingship of Luhrasp was that during his rule the mode of operation of the government of Iran underwent a noticeable change. Until the end of the kingship of Kaykhosrau, the Iranians had believed in hero-saints like Kayka'us and trusted them. During the rulership of Luhrasp, the human element in government begins to show itself alongside the divine. This to the point that a son would demand from his father that he abdicate his kingship in order for him and his commanders to reorganize the kingdom and right all wrongs.

This gravitation to human rule, be it the rule of a king or the guidance of a seer, paved the way for the emergence of the Prophet Zoroaster. After Zoroaster, the organization of the Iranian state became the business of a divinely chosen monarch assisted by divinely recognized *mu'bad*s. Even in historical times, during the reign of kings like Cyrus and Darius, the same dual structure remained as the mainstay of Iranian rule.

Recall that Kaykhosrau foretold the ascension of a king from the line of Luhrasp, during whose reign a prophet with a religion based on justice would appear. Gushtasp was that king. From an early age, he was wayward and headstrong. As a youth he tried to persuade his father to abdicate the throne in his favor; when his father refused, he left Iran and traveled in India. Luhrasp, with the help of Zarir, persuaded Gushtasp to return to Iran. Once in Iran, Gushtasp tried again to unseat his father and again was unsuccessful. This time, he traveled to Rum and married Katayun, the daughter of the Caesar of Rum. By the time that Luhrasp eventually relented and allowed Gushtasp to ascend the throne, Gushtasp was a seasoned individual. His marriage with Katayun indicated that his worldview was far superior to the worldview of his predecessors. During Gushtasp's rule, Iran came into contact with parts of the world that until then had existed merely as words in the culture.

One of the major events of the kingship of Gushtasp was the appearance of the Prophet Zoroaster. Gushtasp accepted Zoroaster's religion and supported, promoted, and even personally propagated it wholeheartedly. The introduction of the religion into the newly united kingdom resulted in reviving the old rivalry

between the Iranians and Turanians; Gushtasp did not pay any attention to that. Rather, with the help of his iron-clad son, Isfandiyar, he confronted Arjasp, around whom the Turanians had rallied, and killed him. The elimination of Arjasp prevented both the dismemberment of united Iran and Turan and the destruction of the Zoroastrian faith.

The conflict between Gushtasp and his son Isfandiyar over the kingship of Iran is reminiscent of the conflict between Luhrasp and his son Gushtasp. On several occasions, Gushtasp promised Isfandiyar that if he could accomplish certain tasks, he would abdicate the throne in his favor. But each time that Isfandiyar returned victorious, Gushtasp found a way to renege on his promise. For instance, on one occasion, he imprisoned Isfandiyar and released him only when he desperately needed his help to defeat Arjasp. At another time, when Isfandiyar seriously demanded his father's abdication, Gushtasp assigned him a task that he knew Isfandiyar would not be able to carry out. He asked Isfandiyar to bring Rustam, who had refused to pay tribute, to court in chains. Before this assignment, Gushtasp had traveled to Zabulistan and lived two years with the champions of the House of Nairam, familiarizing them with the precepts of the new religion. He thought that the conflict that he was creating between Rustam and Isfandiyar would familiarize the youth with a real champion and put some sense into his head. Rustam, however, viewed Isfandiyar's challenge differently and rose to confront his challenger. Once engaged in mortal combat, the aged Rustam could not withstand Isfandiyar's blows and was nearly killed. Additionally, none of his tested tactics were effective against the youth. Out of necessity, Rustam sought the advice of Zal and Simorgh. From them he learned about the mystery of Isfandiyar's iron-clad body. He also learned that if he were to fashion an arrow from the wood of the *gaz* tree and shoot it directly into Isfandiyar's eye, the only vulnerable part of his body, he would be able to destroy him. When they engaged in battle the next time, Rustam followed Simurgh's advice and killed Isfandiyar.

After a rule of 120 years, Gushtasp died and the rulership of Iran passed to Bahman, Isfandiyar's son. After Bahman, his sister-wife Humay Chihrizad ruled for 23 years. After Humay Chihrizad, especially during the rulership of Darab and Dara, the mythic age comes to an end.

ZOROASTER: THE PROPHET OF ANCIENT IRAN

Depending on the sources consulted, the prophet's name appears in a few forms in English. In Avestan it is Zarathushtra; in Modern Standard Persian it is either Zardusht or, less frequently, Zartusht. In English, following Greek, it is Zoroaster.¹¹⁶ The prophet's date of birth and place of birth are unknown. On the basis of her archaeological investigations and carbon-14 dating, as well as relying on the assertions of Greek and Roman historians—Xanthus Pliny, Eudoxus, Plutarch—Settegast places the date of the birth of the Prophet between BCE 6,500 and 6,200.¹¹⁷ More recent researchers present less distant dates. Until the

12th century it was believed that he was born 258 years before Alexander the Great. That would place the date of his birth around 600 BCE. Taqizadeh has accepted this date. Others, like Mary Boyce, suggest 1,000 BCE as a possible date.¹¹⁸ Her statement is more acceptable, as she uses Zoroastrian sources and stylistic features therein to make her decision. Regarding the place of his birth, there are also different opinions. Some point to Azerbaijan, where his father could have come from. Others point to Rayy in ancient Media, where his mother came from. It is most likely that he came from Bactria, where the present-day Republic of Tajikistan exists.¹¹⁹

The name of the prophet Zoroaster does not appear either in the inscriptions of the Achaemenids or in the royal inscriptions of the Sassanids—not even in the writings of the chief priest Kirdēr¹²⁰—but like the lives of other prophets, several miracles are attributed to him; most of them happen when the prophet is a baby. One story tells how the baby prophet was kidnapped and thrown among a herd of cattle. The cattle walked about him carefully. Another story tells how he was thrown into a burning pit and survived. The burning flames turned into roses. He was placed in a wolf's lair after the baby wolves had been slain. He survived because the wolves' jaws were locked. Yet another story tells of how evil men entered the sleeping child's bedchamber, javelin in hand to kill him, but their hands were paralyzed.¹²¹

Zoroaster's grandfather, Haechataspa, was the ancestor of the whole Spitama family. His father was Pourushaspa Spitama, son of Haechataspa Spitama, and his mother was Dughdova. His wife was Hvovi. Zoroaster had three daughters, Freni, Pourucista, and Triti, and three sons, Isat Vastar, Uruvat-Nara, and Hvare Cithra. He received revelation at the age of 30.¹²² His wife, children, and a cousin (Maidhyoimangha) were his first converts. Zoroaster's death is not mentioned in the *Avesta*. In the *Shahname*, a Turanian is said to have murdered him at the altar of the fire temple at Balkh in present-day northern Afghanistan.

The society of the time of Zoroaster was divided into four groups: the first was the *Zaotars*, or priests, who officiated at rituals. They were assisted by *Karapans*. The next group was the *Rathesh tars*, or warriors, skilled in the use of weapons. They were represented by the *Kavis*. The *Fashuyentes/Vastryas*, or herdsmen and husbandmen, formed the third group. The last group was the *Huiti*, or craftsmen, including the blacksmiths and leather workers.¹²³

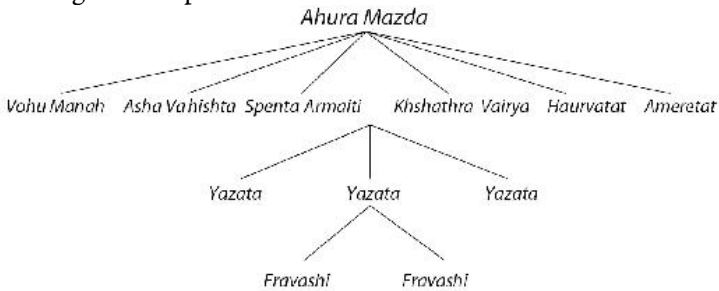
There is a charming story told about Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) that need not deter us here. Suffice it to say that Duperron was a French intellectual, writer, interpreter, traveler, and linguist who was inspired by a fragment of the *Avesta* that was chained to a post at the Bodleian museum. His travel to India to find more information about the fragment resulted in his discovery of the *Avesta*. He pioneered works on the first translation of the *Avesta* into a European language. His efforts generated a great deal of interest in European intellectual circles in the study of Eastern languages and philosophies. He shares with Sir William Jones the discovery of the interrelationship among Indo-European languages that pointed to the closeness of the Avestan language with

Sanskrit.

Duperron was inspired by the publication by Oxford University of “The Wisdom of the Parsees” to uncover the philosophical foundation of the ancient Iranian religion. At age 23, he traveled to India and studied with Dastur Darab, a well-known Zarathushtrian scholar. In 1771, he published *Le Zend-Avesta, ouvrage de Zoroastre*. There were several attempts to discredit Duperron, but they resulted in a better understanding of the philosophy of Zoroaster.

ZOROASTRIAN COSMOLOGY

Recall that the Prophet Zoroaster appeared at the end of the Mythic Age and presented his religion, Zoroastrianism, to King Gushtasp.¹²⁴ The system that he presented was a reorganization of the Mazdian *Spentas*. In it, the *Spentas*, rather than maintaining their generative powers, were organized as equals and as one group of six called the *Amesha Spentas* (holy immortals).¹²⁵ The group was placed under the direct supervision of *Ahura Mazda*.¹²⁶ To the individual *Spentas*, Zoroaster assigned *Yazatas*, and to the *Yazatas*, he assigned the *Fravashis* (souls) of the faithful. This then became the religion of *Aryana Vaeja* and eventually served the Achaemenid monarchs. The configuration of the deities according to Zoroaster’s arrangement is presented in the sidebar.

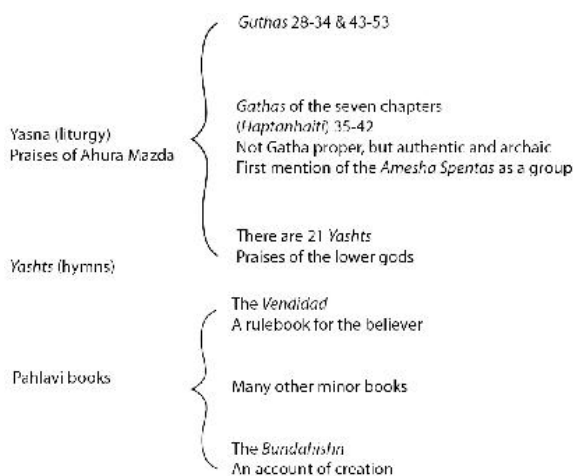


Zoroastrian Deities

ZOROASTRIANISM: PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS

Profession of faith is the first principle in Zoroastrianism. It states that there is one deity, *Ahura Mazda*, also referred to as Wise Lord and Supreme God. He reaches the worlds of spirit and matter through six *Amesha Spentas*, a limited number of celestial and terrestrial *Yazatas*, and a limitless number of *Fravashis*, preexisting souls who help man in his life on earth.

The next principle is revelation. Zoroastrianism is a revealed religion with a scripture called the *Avesta*.



The *Vendidad* is the book of laws of the Parsees. A better name for it is “A Code of Purification.” The book includes chapters on contracts, medicine, and treatment of the canine, hedgehog, turtle, etc. It states that the first object of man is purity, and by that it means physical purity. The purpose of purification is to expel the demon.¹²⁷

In this book, Zoroaster asks *Ahura Mazda* specific questions regarding the faithful’s elementary performance of rituals. Here is an example:

Zarathustra asked *Ahura Mazda*: ‘O *Ahura Mazda*, most beneficent spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! Which is the most deadly deed whereby a man increases most the baleful strength of the *Daevas*, as he would do by offering them a sacrifice?’

Ahura Mazda answered: ‘It is when a man here below combing his hair or shaving it off, or paring off his nails drops them in a hole or in a crack.

“Then for want of the lawful rites being observed, *Daevas* are produced in the earth; for want of the lawful rites being observed, those *Khrafstras* are produced in the earth which men call lice, and which eat up the corn in the corn-field and the clothes in the wardrobe. “Therefore, O Zarathustra! Whenever here below thou shalt comb thy hair or shave it off, or pare off thy nails, thou shalt take them away ten paces from the faithful, twenty paces from the fire, thirty paces from the water, fifty paces from the consecrated bundles of *baresma*.

“Then thou shalt dig a hole, a *disti* (ten fingers) deep if the earth be hard, a *vitasti* (twelve fingers) deep if it be soft; thou shalt take the hair down there and thou shalt say aloud these fiend-smiting words: “Out of him by his piety Mazda made the plants grow up.”

“Thereupon thou shalt draw three furrows with a knife of metal around the hole, or six furrows or nine, and thou shalt chant the *Ahuna-Vairya* three times, or six, or nine.

Here is another example:

And then: "Look here, O *Asho-zusta* (owl) bird! Here are the nails for thee: look at the nails here! May they be for thee so many spears, knives, bows, falcon-winged arrows, and sling-stones against the *Daevas*!"

If those nails have not been dedicated (to the bird), they shall be in the hands of the *Daevas* so many spears, knives, bows, falcon-winged arrows, and sling stones (against the faithful).

All such sinners, embodiments of the *Drugh*, are scorers of the law: all scorers of the law are rebels against the Lord: all rebels against the Lord are ungodly men; and any ungodly man shall pay for it with his life.¹²⁸

The most fundamental teaching of Zoroaster is good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. This principle identifies good thoughts as the most important factor in the creation of a good society. It is thought that is translated into words and it is words that are transformed into action. No evil action takes place before an evil thought is formed. And thoughts are formed consciously. The importance of this triad lies in the fact that the balance of the cosmos depends on the outcome of the conflict between the forces of good and evil. About the society that results from the application of this principle to life, Xenophon comments in *Cyropaedia*, "[Persians] make their citizens from the beginning incapable of setting their hearts on any wickedness or shameful conduct whatsoever."¹²⁹

Furthermore, the Duality Principle requires that human beings take sides.¹³⁰ This decision, however, is not forced on the individual. According to the Free Will Principle, human beings have the right to choose the kingdom to which they wish to contribute. This choice makes the outcome of the conflict between good and evil uncertain.¹³¹

Zoroastrianism is an optimistic religion. It asserts that the eventual triumph will be with Truth. In other words, at the time of the creation of the world, there was a balance between the forces of Good and Evil. In later times, there appeared an intermingling of these forces. The eventual triumph will be that of Truth over the Lie.¹³²

The Zoroastrians further believe in the prophethood of Zoroaster, in the immortality of the soul, and in the existence of an afterlife.¹³³ According to them, all souls must cross the *Chinavat* or Bridge of the Separators. The souls of the Good cross with ease. The souls of the Wicked, when crossing, fall into the Purgatory from which they have to work their way out. All souls are eventually saved. There is no eternal damnation.

Arda Viraf

In ancient times, to understand the nature of Heaven and Hell, the Zoroastrians sent one of their priests to the afterlife to test the truthfulness of the teachings of the *mu'bad*s. While in a trance, induced by drugs, the *mu'bad*, called *Arda Viraf*, was taken to both Heaven and Hell and was shown the consequences of peoples' actions. When he returned, he confirmed that the priests' discussions of Heaven and Hell were correct.¹

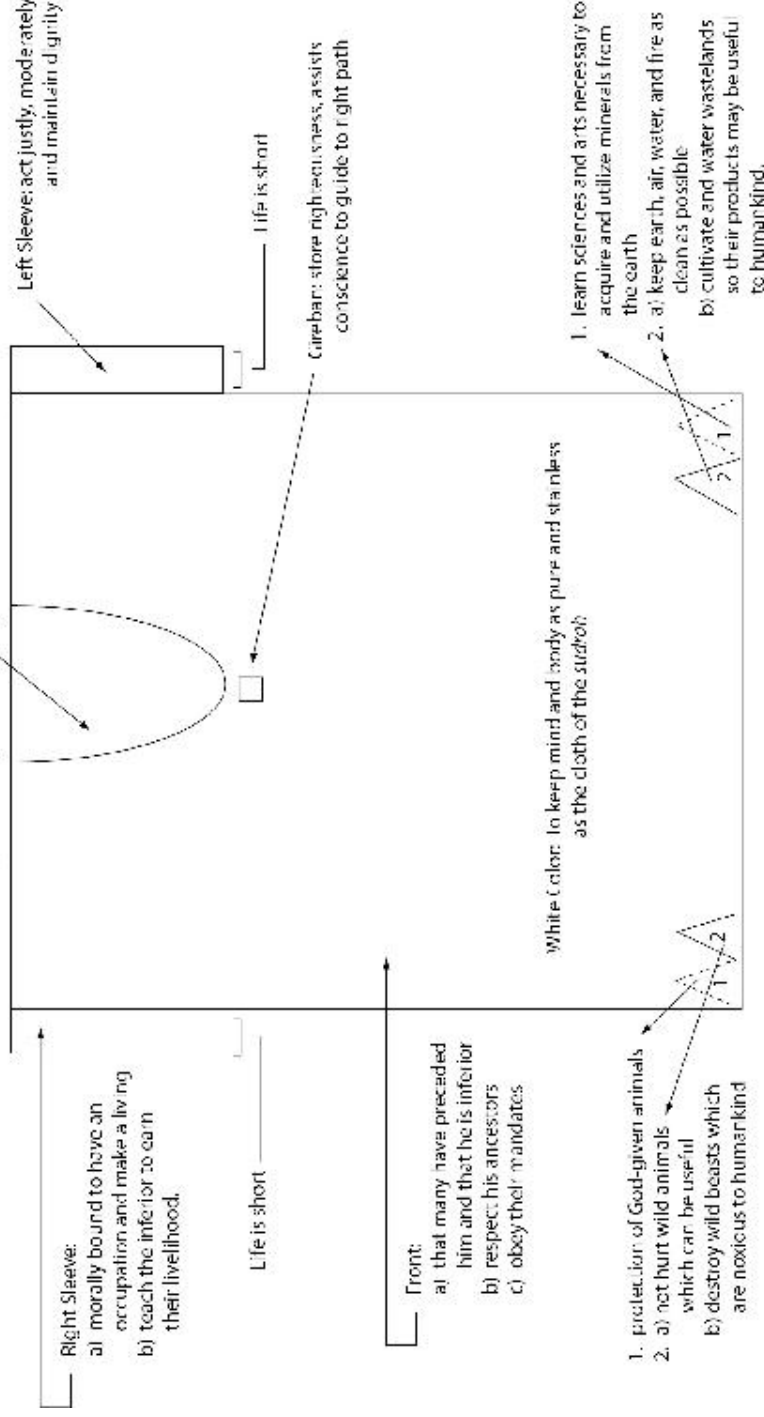
¹ For the full text, see *The Book of Arda Viraf* in the bibliography.

The Zoroastrians also believe in a Redeemer or Messiah. This person is called Saoshiyant.¹³⁴ He is to be born of the seed of Zoroaster. He will appear at the end of Time to save the world. Finally, there is the belief in Angels, Heaven, and Hell.

SUDRAH = sud'profil' + rah'road' (The Spiritual guide of the Mazdayasnan to heaven)

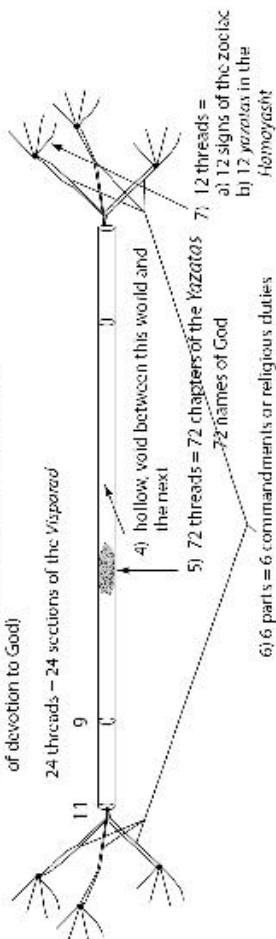
Back: a) many are inferior to Him

b) he should protect and be generous to them (the inferior)



Kusti

- a) made from wool of a sheep
- b) a hollow, cylindrical string, its warp consists of 72 threads and its weft of one unbroken thread (uncure of devotion to God)



- 1) wool: Zoroastrian must be as innocent and harmless as a lamb
- 2) minuteness of threads; earth is composed of minute molecules
- 3) twisting and doubling; connection of this world to: unseen world

Six Commandments or religious duties

1. observe the three fundamental principles of the religion, viz good thoughts, good words, good deeds
2. pray five times a day
3. celebrate the *Yashts* (yearly) feast once a year
4. observe the *Gahambar* ceremonies once in the five days of each of the six *Gahambars*
5. celebrate the twelve monthly *Yashts*
6. perform ceremonies on the 19th day of each month and during the ten days at the end of the year for the benefit of the souls of departed ancestors and relations.

- 8) turning inside out = at resurrection material world will be turned into a paradise
- 9) loosening of the knots to reach heaven
- 10) three tassels = 6 *Gahambar* or seasons of the solar year (*Varis*)
- 11) the final knots indicate universal brotherhood or union

Zoroastrianism has a strict code for purification of the body. The rules for purification are enumerated in the *Vendidad*.¹³⁵

The symbol for the religion of Zoroaster is fire. Fire represents the living force in the universe and has little to do with fire *per se*. It is, thus, a mistake to call the Zoroastrians fire worshipers. Altogether 16 fires are mentioned in the *Avesta*; three are prominent fires and each has a fire temple. The first is *Atash Dadgah*. This is the fire of one's own house consecrated. The second is *Atash Ardān*. This fire is taken from the houses of priests, warriors, agriculturalists, and workmen and

consecrated. The third is *Atash Bahram*. This fire is created by bringing fire from 16 places comprising various trades (blacksmith, goldsmith, potter, kitchen of king, lightning, etc.) and consecrated.

The Novzote Ceremony

The initiation ritual known as the *Navzote* (rebirth) ceremony has four parts: 1) Sacred ablution. The body and the mind of the initiate are purified. At this time, he or she accepts a sacramental drink. 2) Solemn declaration of the creed and granting of the *Sudrah*. 3) Recitation of prescribed texts as the *Kusti* is wound around the waist. 4) Initiating priest showers blessings on the candidate. Although the *Sudrah* and *Kusti* are the “visible” signs of being a Zoroastrian, they are worn under the garment, closest to the body of the faithful.

The task of the priest is to maintain the highest degree of purity in the community by keeping the eternal fire burning. Priesthood is a hereditary office and priests are under the special protection of *Ahura Mazda*.

One of the chief merits of the religion is simplicity. It is encoded in good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Another meritorious aspect is optimism. The Zoroastrian believes that there is no eternal damnation, yet no wholesale forgiveness of sins. Rewards and punishments in the afterlife fit the deeds of the individual on the earth plane. Finally, sincere repentance (through prayer) is the first step to salvation. Mere verbal confession is not permissible.

Ritual practices, too, are straightforward. Every Zoroastrian must pray five times in twenty-four hours (five *gahs*). Prayers are said while facing the fire, the light, or the sun. Prayers are said in the sacred language. They should be performed in high places or in open air. During prayer, the head must be covered.

Zoroastrians lived in agricultural communities.¹³⁶ Their festivals, therefore, are tied to the seasons. There are the festivals of harvesting the winter crop, sowing the summer crop, harvesting the summer crop, and sowing the winter crop. There are also festivals for recreation and enjoyment during winter, and prayers in remembrance of the departed.

Fasting is not permitted in Zoroastrianism. It actually is a sin. Zoroastrianism considers fasting as an ascetic act that enfeebles the body. Therefore, it must be avoided. Penance, too, is forbidden. Those who do fast must give food to a number of people in the community. The reason for this approach to fasting is that Zoroaster promoted a prosperous life that requires a strong economy. In an agricultural setting it means silos full of grain. Can that happen without hard work? Another thing that is not permitted is celibacy. It is a sin. Every Zoroastrian must marry and add to the kingdom of the Good by having many children. Marriage to a non-Zoroastrian is not permitted. There are also some activities that are new to the ancient faith. The choice of undertaking those activities, like smoking cigarettes, is left to the believer. To the authorities, smoking is a non-Zoroastrian act.

In time, like all other religions, the adherents of Zoroaster's religion spoke against it or merely modified some of its main principles. The major schisms in Zoroastrianism are Manicheism, Mithraism, and Zurvanism. There was also an

attempt at introducing social reform in Zoroastrian Iran under the reformer Mazdak. We shall deal with that aspect of the faith in its appropriate place.

25 For an explanation of the *Nowruz* celebration, see Bashiri, 2004, pp. v–xv.

26 For the geneology of Fereydun, see *Bundahishn* XXXI, 7.

27 Tus and Gustaham are the sons of King Nawzar. Tus, a wayward champion, is not endowed with the kingly *farr*. We find him frequently at odds with the royal house and with the house of Gudarz. The latter is a staunch supporter of Kaykhosrau, who wins the kingly glory in a contest against Tus.

28 Giv, the son of Gudarz, is one of the most loved heroes of the epic. He is credited with finding and bringing Kaykhosrau from Turan to grace the Iranian throne. For a detailed study of the house of Gudarz and its relation to the Parthian dynasty, see Yarshater, 1983, pp. 457–461.

29 See, A. Ahrarov's "Epic on the Screen," in *Firdowsi's Shahname: 1000 Years After*, Dushanbe, 1994, pp. 206–217.

30 Warner, vol. II, p. 195.

31 The name Rustam is listed neither among the *Kavis* of the *Avesta*, nor among lesser personages like Tusa and the sons of Vaeska. He might be a figment of Firdowsi's imagination, a replacement for a *Kavi* otherwise not mentioned, or a hero of the Sakian tribes immortalized in the Sistan chronicles. For Sam and his son, Zal, and the Sakian genesis of the eastern house, see Yarshater, 1983, pp. 453–457. See also Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 291–389.

32 The story of Siyavosh also appears in Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatname* (Book of Government), where the Wazir discusses the shortcomings of allowing women of the court to participate in the affairs of State. See Darke, 1962, pp. 242–245. For the role of women in the epic, see Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 119–128.

33 Warner, vol. II, p. 203.

34 Warner, vol. II, p. 207.

35 Warner, vol. II, p. 208.

36 Warner, vol. II, p. 212.

37 Warner, vol. II, p. 220.

38 For a geneology of Afrasiyab, see *Bundahishn* XXXI, 14–18.

39 Warner, vol. II, p. 225.

40 According to the *Hodud al-'Alam*, Marvrud was a "pleasant and prosperous town situated at the foot of a mountain. It abounded in fruit, and the river of Merv skirted it (*bar karan*)," p. 105. Marvrud was also on the highway (*shabrah*) that passed Fariyab and Shapurghan (now Shabirqun) to Balkh. *Hodud*, p. 39.

41 A survey of the literature on Taliqan reveals three locations: Taliqan of Rayy, Taliqan of Tukharistan, near Qunduz, and Taliqan of Khurasan or, more precisely, of Juzjanan. This latter seems to be the one meant by Firdowsi. It was three days journey from Marvrud in the direction of Balkh. The town fell to Chingiz Khan after a seven-month siege in 617 A.H. and was razed. It was never rebuilt. See Mir Abul Ghasemi, 1970, pp. 5–25. See also Le Strange, 1977, pp. 423–32.

42 Quotations in the body of the text are the present author's renditions of long passages in the original text. They will not be marked for reference.

43 Warner, vol. II, p. 237.

44 Warner, vol. II, p. 241.

45 Warner, vol. II, pp. 242–243.

46 Warner, vol. II, p. 244.

47 Warner, vol. II, p. 248.

48 Warner, vol. II, pp. 248–249.

49 Warner, vol. II, pp. 249–250.

50 For the significance of covenant as explained in the *Mihr Yasbt*, see Gershevitch, 1967, pp. 42.

51 Warner, vol. II, p. 250.

52 Warner, vol. II, p. 250.

53 Warner, vol. II, p. 252.

54 Warner, vol. II, p. 255.

- 55 Warner, vol. II, p. 255.
- 56 Warner, vol. II, p. 258.
- 57 Warner, vol. II, p. 258.
- 58 Warner, vol. II, p. 260.
- 59 Warner, vol. II, p. 263.
- 60 Warner, vol. II, p. 264; on the geneology of the Kayanian dynasty, see *Bundahishn* XXXI, 1–36.
- 61 Warner, vol. II, pp. 273–274.
- 62 Warner, vol. II, p. 276.
- 63 Warner, vol. II, pp. 277–278.
- 64 Warner [amended], vol. II, p. 285.
- 65 Warner, vol. II, pp. 296–297.
- 66 Warner, vol. II, p. 307.
- 67 Warner, vol. II, p. 311.
- 68 Warner, vol. II, p. 312.
- 69 For further study of the life of Siyavosh, see Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 173–224.
- 70 Warner [amended], vol. III, p. 17.
- 71 Same as Nairam.
- 72 Warner, vol. III, p. 18.
- 73 Warner, vol. III, p. 19.
- 74 By the time of Firdowsi, Central Asia had all but lost its importance as the center of Mazdian and Zoroastrian Iran. By that time, it seems, the western Iranian lands, identified with the Achaemenid and later Sassanid powers, had become increasingly prominent.
- 75 Warner, vol. III, p. 20.
- 76 Warner, vol. III, p. 21.
- 77 It should be noted that *kin* (vengeance) bred *kin* and that without vengeance to set a chaotic world right, justice could not rule. To Kaykhosrau, the murder of Siyavosh represented an impudent infringement of *Ahriman* on the most hallowed sanctuaries of his Creator. It represented a violation of his *farr*. It was not unusual, therefore, for him to seek assistance from his co-sufferer, his Maker, in this cosmic duel for restoring the reign of justice.
- 78 Note that Firdowsi does not consider language as a growing and changing part of the culture. He assumes that Pahlavi (i.e., Middle Persian) had been the language of Iran even in pre-Zoroastrian times.
- 79 Warner, vol. III, p. 22.
- 80 Warner, vol. III, p. 22.
- 81 Warner, vol. III, p. 24.
- 82 Warner, vol. III, p. 25.
- 83 Piran, the ever-present commander-in-chief of Turan, was in disgrace at the time of Kaykhosrau's preparations to invade Turan. Kaykhosrau, it should be mentioned, was the cause of this disgrace because Piran had facilitated his flight from Turan.
- 84 Dehkhoda (and other Persian sources) does not give this river a definite location. He merely identifies it with Turan and with the incident in the *Shahname* under discussion here. See Dehkhoda, Letter Kaf, Tehran, 1339.
- Le Strange, while he does not mention either Kasseh Rud *per se* or relate his discussion to the *Shahname*, discusses a gorge in which the pile of wood to be set ablaze by Giv might have been: "One march north-west of Tirmidh, on the road to Kish and Nakhshab in Sughd, was the town of Hashimjird, a place of some importance in the 4th [10th] century, and two marches north of this the road passed through the famous Iron Gate.
- " This defile in the mountains was described by the Chinese traveler, Hwen Thsang, who as a Buddhist pilgrim visited India in CE 629. The Arab geographers speak of a town here, and Yāqubi names it the City of the Iron Gate (Madinah Bab-al-Hadid), of which he also gives the Persian form, Dar Ahanin." See Le Strange, 1977, p. 441.
- Tirmidh is on the Amu Darya. The gorge, therefore, is three marches, north-northwest of Tirmidh. What other river than the Jeyhun or the Amu can Kasseh Rud be? Le Strange further observes

that “with the Arabs, rivers were very commonly named from the great cities on their banks; hence the Amu Darya, the River of Amu, also was often called the Balkh River, although that city stands some miles distant from its southern bank.”

For Kasseh Rud's relation to Kath, see Dehkhoda, Letter Kaf.

85 Warner, vol. III, p. 29.

86 Warner, vol. III, pp. 30–31.

87 Warner, vol. III, pp. 39–40; for the life story of Farud and his relation to Piran, see Eslami-Nodushan, 1985, pp. 224–249.

88 Warner, vol. III, p. 40.

89 The site of this fortress is variously identified with Kalat-i Naderi, about thirty miles north of Meshed and with Kalat-i Ghilzai in southeastern Afghanistan. Neither of these locations fits Firdowsi's description. The former is the impregnable fortress that gave Alexander his share of difficulty (see, Engels, 1978, p. 88) and which Curzon considers “one of the most extraordinary natural phenomena in the world, and famous even in this land of mountain fastness and impregnable defiles for its inaccessibility and amazing natural strength” (Curzon, 1966, p. 113). This fortress, however, is not located on Sepid Kuh, the mountainous region southwest of Afghan Turkistan. Kalat-i Ghilzai is too far from Kasseh Rud and leads to the Punjab rather than to the Oxus and Sughd. This author believes that since Farud's fortification is not regarded as a major fort—the Iranian army did not have a hard time capturing it—it is a *qal'a* somewhere on the Sefid Kuh between the fork beyond Herat where the traveler has to decide whether to cross the mountainous region of Afghan Turkistan to reach the Amu or enter the Qara Qum desert. Tus chooses the former. That he chooses this route in spite of his knowledge that it crosses many hills and dales further strengthens the argument that he took his army through northern Afghanistan in the direction of the Amu.

See also M. Aurel Stein, 1907; 1975, p. 37, where he attributes Tashqurqan to Afrasiyab. This stone tower is likely to have been the site of Farud's castle, especially if Tus crossed the Oxus east of Tirmidh. Furthermore, the area described above has often been in Turanian hands while the other two locations have usually been in Iranian and other hands.

90 Warner, vol. III, p. 46.

91 Warner, vol. III, p. 50.

92 Warner, vol. III, p. 51.

93 Warner, vol. III, p. 58.

94 Warner, vol. III, p. 60.

95 Warner, vol. III, p. 62.

96 Warner, vol. III, pp. 71–72.

97 Warner, vol. III, p. 75.

98 Warner, vol. III, p. 78.

99 Warner, vol. III, p. 80.

100 Warner, vol. III, p. 83.

101 Warner, vol. III, pp. 87–88.

102 Warner, vol. III, pp. 88–89.

103 Warner, vol. III, p. 94.

104 Warner, vol. III, p. 95.

105 Warner, vol. III, pp. 110–111.

106 Warner, vol. III, p. 175.

107 It should be noted that Piran is not describing Afrasiyab's physical might, rather that even his sorcery had been ineffective against Rustam.

108 Warner, vol. IV, p. 14.

109 Warner, vol. IV, p. 14.

110 Warner, vol. IV, pp. 145–146.

111 Warner, vol. IV, pp. 272–274.

112 Warner, vol. IV, p. 285.

113 Warner, vol. IV, p. 288.

- 114 Warner, vol. IV, p. 289.
- 115 Warner, vol. IV, p. 302.
- 116 For aspects of the life of Prophet Zoroaster, see Dhalla, pp. 13–23.
- 117 For details, see Settegast, pp. 9, 53–55; for a detailed account of Zoroaster’s life from birth to ministry, see *Dinkard*, II–V.
- 118 Zoroaster could have lived between 1700 and 1500 BCE, Boyce, 1979, p. 18.
- 119 See also Settegast, pp. 55–56, 113.
- 120 See Boyce, 1979, pp. 56–57.
- 121 For the early days of Zoroaster, leading to the court of Vishtasp, see Settegast, p. 58. For world reaction to Zoroaster and his teaching, especially the treatment he received at the hands of ancient Persians and Greeks, see Zaehner, 1975, p. 19.
- 122 See Boyce, 1979, p. 19.
- 123 Nanavutty, 1999, p. 18.
- 124 For Prophet Zoroaster at the court of Gushtasp, see Dhalla, pp. 25–26. For king Gushtasp’s assistance in the establishment of Zoroastrianism, see Dhalla, p. 142.
- 125 On the *Amesha Spentas*: creation, attributes, and work, see Dhalla, pp. 162–164.
- 126 For aspects of *Ahura Mazda*: nature, immanence, and intelligence, see Dhalla, pp. 31–34; on his creative aspect, see Dhalla, pp. 154–157.
- 127 For the reverence that Zoroastrians paid to water and fire as well as plants and animals, see Settegast, p. 62.
- 128 Darmesteter, pp. 186–189.
- 129 Xenophon, I, c. II, 2.
- 130 Regarding the choice between good and evil, see Boyce, 1979, p. 20.
- 131 Cf., Settegast, pp. 62–65.
- 132 Cf., Settegast, p. 60.
- 133 On resurrection, see Zaehner, 1956, pp. 317–318; see also 1979, pp. 12–16.
- 134 For a discussion of Saoshiyant, see Boyce, 1979, p. 42; see also *Bundahishn* XXX, 4–27.
- 135 Regarding purity laws, see Boyce, 1979, p. 43–47.
- 136 For the importance of agriculture, especially in the “Yonger Avesta,” see Settegast, p. 56.

THE HISTORIC AGE

THE IRANIAN PLATEAU

5000 to 1000 BCE

Historically, the region encompassing Parthia, Media, and eastern Persia (i.e., present-day Iran, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan), as well as the eastern slope of the Zagros Mountains, is recognized as the Iranian Plateau. The western slope of the Zagros Mountains, including the plain of Khuzistan, is regarded as a transition between the Mesopotamian and the Iranian plateaus.¹³⁷

When we discuss life in Iran, even ancient Iran, we usually treat the region as if Iranians have always inhabited that part of the world, and that this area has always been called Iran. A cursory survey of the past history of the plateau indicates that the inhabitants of the plateau had had a life of their own for many centuries before the arrival of the Iranian tribes. Recent archaeological finds enhance our understanding of the plateau and provide a better perspective on the development of its cultures.¹³⁸

Roman Ghirshman, who made excavations at Tepe Sialk in 1933–34, and again in 1937, has presented some very informative data and data analysis regarding the region.¹³⁹ Between 1999 and 2004, Iranian archaeologists also have investigated the area and enhanced Ghirshman's contributions. In what follows, we shall discuss the events on the plateau that culminate in the existence of a vibrant life at Sialk, and some other communities, at the time of the appearance of the Aryans.

The Tepe Sialk complex consists of two hills (south and north), half a kilometer apart. There are also two cemeteries, known as Cemetery A, 200 meters south, and Cemetery B, 250 meters west of the southern hill, respectively. The complex, a settlement of hunters, gatherers, and potters, was established around 5,000 BCE. Now it is a hill to the south of the present-day town of Kashan. By all indications, the settlement was ruled by women who also served as creators of agriculture and repositories of knowledge about edible roots. Women also served as guardians of the fire. As priests, they provided bloodline for succession.¹⁴⁰ Similar settlements existed at Susa, Tepe Hisar, Tepe Gujan, Zuriyeh, and Hasanlu.

In these primitive settlements, the dead were buried under the floor. Their bodies were covered with iron oxide, a red, preservative substance. Shells from the Persian Gulf indicate that the inhabitants might have been familiar with the concept of trade or they might have used shells as ornaments. Other things that indicate the existence of a rudimentary civilization in the area include carved bones, hammered objects, stone tools, knife blades, sickle blades, axes, and scrapers.

The settlers at Sialk made use of a type of coarse pottery that was no more than

pieces of clay hardened by the heat of the fire. Later, a type of pottery was created that could be painted with primitive designs mimicking everyday objects. There was also a primitive textile industry that used stone spindles. At this level, there were no houses in the modern sense. They used *Pisé* housing to protect themselves against the elements. *Pisé* housing consists of a hole dug into the side of a hillock with the entrance covered by brush.

The economy of the settlement was simple. Wheat and barley were bartered for furs and arrows. The important event of 4,000 BCE in the area was the emergence of the village in which houses were made with oval mud bricks. Communal labor was employed to build houses, clean the ground, and provide implements for irrigation. Use of the horse facilitated transportation and travel. Discovery of precious stones led to the creation of jewelry. Metal and pottery works of the time display realistic designs of ibexes, birds, and boars on bowls, utensils, and jars. Gradually the oval mud brick is replaced with rectangular bricks and tall doorways appear. Women command armies and next-of-kin marriage becomes a common practice (brother and sister, seldom mother and son).¹⁴¹

By 3,000 BCE, writing and the wheel revolutionize life at Sialk. The inhabitants use cylinder seals to identify ownership, or mark prices. Additionally, they express their ideas through sophisticated designs on pottery produced on the wheel. Along the same line, cornelian and turquoise add to the refinement of jewelry and introduction of bricks made in molds adds improvement to the building of houses.

By 2,000 BCE, iron is found and used in making implements of war, especially swords and helmets. Gradually, Sialk comes out of isolation and is in touch with such communities as the Hurians, the Mitanis, and the Kassites.¹⁴²

At this juncture, the Indo-European tribes appear on the plateau and impact the lives of the original inhabitants. They arrive through the Caucasus as Hittites, Scythians, Medes, and Pars. To the west the Hittites capture Babylon. To the north, Iranians capture the Zagros Mountains.¹⁴³ To the northeast, Indo-Iranians take over present-day Central Asia and northwestern India.¹⁴⁴

The Sialk community is a good choice for understanding the emergence of the Aryans on the plateau. It provides developments near the Median capital of Ecbatana that can be compared with similar developments in Assyria and Babylonia. We see, especially, how the Iranian invaders established a hierarchy of priests, landowners, craftsmen, peasants, and slaves that catered to the spiritual and material needs of the ruling classes consisting of the king of kings, who occupied the uppermost level of the hierarchy, a group of lower kings, princes, nobles, and free men. We also discover the spiritual reality on which this structure is founded—the Zoroastrian hierarchy of gods, archangels, and angels.

Tepe Sialk was destroyed in the eighth century BCE.

Over the centuries, Ancient cultures developed their own unique cosmologies and mythologies. A cursory look at the *Bundahishn* and Firdowsi's *Shahname*¹⁴⁵ is sufficient to indicate the depth of the drama that characterizes the Iranian peoples' account of the genesis of their own culture. This, however, is not the only way to access information about ancient Iranian culture. We have already examined the archaeological remains in Iran, beginning with Sialk in the center of the plateau. On the basis of the artifacts discovered, we could follow the events leading to the emergence of the Iranians as a people, the formation of their society, the development of commerce and, more importantly, the introduction of the divine right of kings as the mainstay of their culture.¹⁴⁶ This background leads to the rise of the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid dynasties. Still a third method combines what data is available in the present material culture with what might have logically existed in the mother culture of which Iranian culture is a part. This latter method necessarily takes us outside the immediate Iranian beginnings and into the world of the Indo-Europeans. Who are the Indo-Europeans?

An answer to this question was first offered in the eighteenth century when correspondences were established among a vast number of languages geographically scattered between India and Ireland. For example, the word for father, with certain phonological variations, is found in all the genetically related languages descending from Indo-European. The phonemic form of the German word for father is *fater*, the French is *pe:r*, the Gothic is *fadar*, the Latin and Greek is *pater*, the Sanskrit is *pitar*, the Persian is *pedar*, and the Pashto is *pidar*. Elementary phonology accounts for these differences, establishing **pater* as the Proto-Indo-European word for father. The asterisk (*) indicates that the form is a reconstruction. Similarly, words for mother, brother, sister, and daughter in these languages yield **mater*, **bhrater*, **sweser*, and **dhugheter*, respectively.

Indo-European Languages

English	Seven	Father	Mother	Brother	Sister	Daughter	Is
German	Sibun	Fater	Mutter	Brudar	Shwester	Tochter	Ist
French	Sept	Pere	Mere	Frere	Soeur	Fille	Est
Persian	Haft	Pedar	Madar	Baradar	Khwahar	Dokhtar	Ast
Latin	Septem	Pater	Mater	Frater	Soror	Dauhtar	Estr
Spanish	Siete						
Russian	Siem						
Pashto				Pidar			
Sanskrit	Sapta	Pitar	Matar	Bhratar	Svasar	Duhitar	Asti
Greek	Hepta	Pater	Meter	Brater		Thugater	Esti
	*septm	*peter	*mater	*bhrater	*swesor	*dhugheter	*esti

Non-Indo European Languages

Turkish	Yedi	ata	anna	kardesh	Kizkardeshi	kiz	*
Arabic	Sab'a	ab	umm	akh	ukht	Bint	*

One important word that we can reconstruct is **agros*, referring both to the village, which included a number of households, and to its immediate cultivated and uncultivated surroundings. *Agros* was the “world” of the Indo-European. Anything beyond the *agros* belonged to an unknown and thereby awe-inspiring world.

Early in the morning the cattle were taken to pasture in the meadows beyond the cultivated fields surrounding the settlement. The man of the household counted the animals as they were entrusted to the shepherd. One of two counting systems, either a four-base system that used the twelve finger joints, or a five-base system that used the four fingers and the thumb, was employed in counting. The man repeated this procedure when the cattle returned early in the evening to make sure that all the livestock were back safely. One or two guard dogs usually accompanied the shepherd; dogs were among the earliest animals to be domesticated.

In the fields surrounding the village, barley was cultivated (wheat was unknown and was not cultivated until much later in the region that we now identify as the Middle East). Since the people were primarily cattle breeders and herders, their knowledge of agriculture was not as sophisticated as their understanding of animal science. Indeed, their very lives depended on the products from their livestock—milk, wool, meat, and leather. Their respect for animals, reflected in later texts, clearly underscores the value they placed on the animal kingdom.

Each village consisted of a number of families organized around the father, known as *pater familias*. This individual was responsible for the protection and well

being of the unit, and the family revolved around him. His wife, who came from a different family, gave up her identity with her own blood relations and formed new relationships within her husband's household. The term "wife," in fact, cannot be reconstructed because this individual was referred to only as "mother," "daughter-in-law," etc.; she was never addressed via her relationship to her husband.

One of the main tasks of the *pater familias* was to invite the gods to a sacrificial meal. If the gods were happy with the family, they would descend and partake of the feast. The religious system of the Indo-Europeans, therefore, was quite simple. All gods lived in the sky. There was no need to erect temples in the village and, consequently, there was no word for temple. The father was the priest of the family, so there was no priestly caste distinct from the heads of the families. The people worshiped the eternal elements including water, fire, the wind, the moon, the dawn, and the heavens as representatives or personifications of the deity.

Gradually the animals and plants within the *agros* acquired special status as totems. Sacred totems were safeguarded while evil totems were annihilated. As a result of this strict system of distinguishing sacred from evil animals and plants, a rich body of vocabulary on the flora and fauna of the *agros* can be reconstructed. The discovery of this vocabulary is significant for locating the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans.¹⁴⁷

The precise reasons for the disintegration of the Indo-European community are not clear. Perhaps in search of better pastures, the bulk of the population traveled westward, later forming the Greco-Roman, Indo-Iranian, and other post-Indo-European civilizations. A small Indo-Iranian group, known as the Aryans, moved south and east, and settled in the northern regions of the Caspian Sea and the Aral Lake, the area of the present-day southern Russia and Kazakhstan. The Aryan community believed in abstract gods who dwelled in the sky and sent representatives to earth. A pantheon of gods, similar to the one developed by the European branch, took shape. Gods like *Mithra*, *Varuna*, *Anahita*, *Indra*, and *Khshathra* oversaw the deeds of mortals and meted out rewards and punishments.

Around 3,500 years ago, this Aryan group also disintegrated into smaller units, its members migrating in different directions. One group, the Indic peoples, eventually settled in the Punjab, in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. There they displaced a rather advanced civilization, the material remains of which have been excavated at Mohenjo-Daro, Chanhudaro, and Harappa. The other branch, the Iranic peoples, settled south of the Aral Lake, in what in medieval times came to be known as Khwarazm. At the time, however, this place was called *Aryana Vaeja* or "special land of the Aryans." It was in *Aryana Vaeja* that a new Iranian cosmology and mythology grew out of the old system. *Ahura Mazda*, breaking away from the *Asuras*, formed a new pantheon and initiated his search for a prophet who would communicate his message to the people. Yama and others were tested, before Kaykhosrau announced the advent of the Prophet Zoroaster. Kaykhosrau told the greats of Iran of the time that a prophet would come to the court of the descendants of Luhrasp. And so it happened. The Prophet Zoroaster appeared at the court of Vishtasp (same as

Gushtasp) and revealed his religion. Firdowsi in his immortal *Shahname* narrates the myth that describes the advent of the prophet of ancient Iran, Zoroaster.

THE EMPIRES OF THE MEDES AND THE PARS

The Iranian Peoples

Iran has a glorious past. Its history can serve as a guideline to direct our present decisions and actions on the basis of past decisions. A better understanding of their history might prevent us from repeating those mistakes. It might even provide us with principles by which to organize our future. It would be useful, for instance, to find out what kind of a worldview the ancient Iranians had. What were their religious beliefs? How did they treat their friends and foes? Furthermore, what kind of family structure did they have? How did husbands treat their wives? How were children raised and educated? We may want to go a degree higher and ask, what kind of social and political organizations did they create? What made them one of the twelve major civilizations of the world?

One of the major concerns of the historian writing about ancient times is the sources at his or her disposal. In the case of ancient Iran, the sources fall into four categories: religious documents, the *Avesta*, the *Pahlavi* books, and the friezes left by the Achaemenid kings at Behistun, Persepolis, and Susa. There are also histories that were written during Islamic times, including the *Shahname* of Firdowsi, as well as histories written by foreigners, like Herodotus and Xenophon, authors with whose countries Iranians had been engaged in war.

The authenticity, accuracy, and bias in these sources are noteworthy. For instance, the authenticity of the religious documents produced in ancient Iran is not as much in question as is their accuracy. That is because the religious information contained in the texts was not recorded until a long time after it was initially put forth. The *Avesta*, for instance, was not reduced to writing until the 4th century AD, perhaps during the reign of Shapur II. This is not to mention reliance on interpretation and the accuracy of translations.¹⁴⁸

The same is true about the friezes at Persepolis, Behistun, and Susa. They are authentic but their accuracy is a matter of historical interpretation. In addition, the information they contain is limited to the names of kings, conquests, and building projects of the rulers, names of the satrapies of the empire, and the devotion of the king to *Abura Mazda* and, in some cases, to other gods. There is very little information about the lives of ordinary people.

A similar case can be made for histories written during Islamic times. They emphasize Prophet Muhammad and other prophets. They elaborate on Islamic conquests, the lives of Islamic rulers, and the “legendary” heroes of ancient Iran. Very little information is provided either on pre-Islamic rulers of Iran or the lives of their contemporaries.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that a good part of the history of ancient Iran has been written by foreigners, mostly enemies of Iran. Authors like

Herodotus relied on the memories of people before them who might have traveled in the region and presented an uninformed account of life there. Even Xenophon, who visited western Iranian lands of his time, had a vague understanding of Iranians, even of Cyrus the Younger. This is not to question the authenticity of their work, but to point out that their statements include inaccuracies. For instance, some of the dates, such as the date for the battle between Cyrus the Great and Croesus, are, at best, debatable. Conversely, their information on the culture is fairly accurate, while their political views, as expected, are somewhat biased. That could be because they did not have first-hand information, or were given to exaggeration, or followed certain cultural mores. Neither was this something exclusive to Greeks, who called all non-Greeks barbarians. The ancient Egyptians practiced that kind of thinking as one of their major rules of *ma'at*.

Eastern Aryans

The history of ancient Iran is tied to the rise and fall of peoples and dynasties on the Iranian Plateau, an area delimited by the Alburz range (north), the Zagros range (west), the ancient cities of Balkh and Herat (east), and the present-day provinces of Baluchistan and Sistan (south). Both archeological and historical evidence confirms that the Eastern Aryans either invaded or simply migrated into this region around 1000 BCE. They were the second wave of Aryans (same as Indo-Iranians) to migrate south along the eastern Caspian corridor. Some 800 years earlier, another Aryan group had migrated to northwestern India by way of Afghanistan and the Suleiman Mountains.

In time, for whatever reasons, the similarities between the groups became less. In some instances, they became contradictory such that the same concept in one was interpreted in exactly the opposite way in the other. For example, the concept of "*Ahura*," a benevolent god, found its opposite in "*Asura*." Similarly, the benevolent "*devas*" of India became the malevolent "*devs*" (demons) of ancient Iranian lands.¹⁴⁹

Aryana Vaeja

The Iranian Aryans called their previous homeland *Aryana Vaeja* (Unique *Aryana*).¹⁵⁰ *Aryana Vaeja* stretched from the northeastern regions of the Caspian Sea to the areas south of the Aral Lake. According to the Aryans' legends, *Aryana Vaeja* was a prosperous realm, a paradise that did not know either the lie, or disease, or death. There, they had lived under the protection of Jamshid, a divine king with the *farr*, a king who had expanded the land three times to accommodate his people. He had also protected them against the big freeze.

The question is this: If *Aryana Vaeja* was such a paradise lost, why did they leave it? At least three reasons come to mind. The first reason is an increase in the population, hence Jamshid's effort at expanding the land three times. This might be difficult for us to realize, but in those days the facilities of food production, transportation, and security that we enjoy today did not exist. The only way for

people to provide more was to move to better pastures. Neither did they have the facilities of later generations to accommodate large populations in relatively small areas. The second reason is the extreme cold that their legends speak about. *Ahura Mazda* had ordered Jamshid to build a *var* (holding place), with a big roof and to move into it the best of every species, in pairs, to safeguard them against seven years of freezing cold. The third reason is what we can call unruly neighbors. The Eastern Sakas, who lived to their east, were a ruthless, bloodthirsty people. They plundered the wealth of their neighbors and were constantly at war. Men and women fought, and they were proud to drink wine in the skulls of their dead enemies.

Greater Khurasan

Usually people migrate from one place to another hoping that the circumstances in the new place will be better. Often that is the case. In the case of the Eastern Aryans, however, it was not. This was a land that was already the home of local people with ties to the major powers of the region. The newcomers had to deal with the natives of the area in one of two ways. They had to either subjugate them to their rule by force, or they had to absorb them into their own numbers through their superior culture. Additionally, the Eastern Saka did not leave them alone. They, too, moved south and continued to harass them.

To deal with these problems, the Eastern Aryans organized themselves into larger communities and introduced a rigid social organization consisting of priests, herders, and warriors. In other words, they began to establish themselves as the main power in greater Khurasan. Most important, they assumed a new identity: the Part. The cities of Samarqand, Bukhara, Merv, Herat, and Kabul hark to those days.

The Prophet Zoroaster

The major event of this era, around 10th century BCE, is the advent of the Prophet Zoroaster. As it was explained, he appeared at the court of Gushtasp (same as Vishtasp) and presented his dualistic religion. He spoke about good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, and he wanted animal sacrifice to be outlawed and agriculture to be promoted. Gushtasp supported Zoroaster. To increase the productivity of the mostly arid land, a *qanat* (conduit) system was devised whereby water from the mountains could be brought to the Iranian plateau.¹⁵¹ In this way, a progressive agricultural community gathered around sources of clean and clear water, worshiped Truth (fire), and kept violence in contempt.¹⁵²

Western Aryans

The western Aryans consisted of two major groups. They came down the western side of the Caspian Sea. We know them as the Medes and the Pars. The Medes settled in the northwest and built a capital called Ecbatana (present-day Hamadan). The Pars settled in the southwest in a place known as Anshan. Since

they were from the same Indo-European stock, the Medes and the Pars supported each other against the larger powers in the region, especially Assyria and Babylonia.¹⁵³

Assyria

Assyria was centered on the city of Nineveh on the Upper Tigris River. It was a major power often ruling other major powers, like Babylonia. Its history, like the history of ancient Egypt, must be studied in phases. The Old Assyrian Empire lasted from the 20th to 15th centuries BCE. The Middle Phase lasted from the 15th century BCE until the 10th century. The Neo-Assyrian phase lasted from 911 to 612 BCE. The phase we know most about is the Neo-Assyrian Phase.

The Neo-Assyrians were warlike and extremely merciless. They had a well-organized army consisting of infantry, cavalry, javelin throwers, and archers. They were well known for razing cities to the ground and killing all living beings. In the middle of the 7th century BCE, about 40 years before its fall, Assyria reached its zenith. During this time Assyria captured Egypt, degraded Lydia, destroyed Elam, and intimidated Urartu. Internally, it became affluent and extravagant.¹⁵⁴ Ashurbanipal (r. 668–627 BCE), one of the last major rulers of Assyria, controlled all of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt. Assyria was destroyed by the combined forces of Media and Babylonia (see below).

Babylonia

Babylonia was centered on the city of Babylon in the area of present-day Iraq. Babylon was built by Hammurabi (ca. 17th century BCE) on the ruins of the Akkadian Empire. Babylonia used the written Semitic Akkadian for its official language and Sumerian, already a dead language, for religious purposes. As a result of the victory over Assyria, Babylonia gained Lower Mesopotamia, as well as Syria and Palestine. Egypt, one of the major countries in the Assyrian Empire, struck out on its own. In fact, the pharaoh of Egypt, Neco, invaded Syria but was not able to capture it. Babylonia, thereafter, did not invade Egypt.¹⁵⁵

Compared to the Assyrians, the Babylonians were civilized. Their kings, especially their last king, Nabonidus (556–539 BCE), liked building massive fortifications and palaces by using slave labor and corvée work. For structures that cost more, they taxed the citizenry, an act that added to the unhappiness of the Babylonians. Additionally, Nabonidus prayed to *Sin*, the moon god, and built temples to him, as opposed to *Marduk*. All these factors added to the dissatisfaction of the people at a time that Babylonia's ally, Persia, was designing the fall of this second important power in the region.

Urartu

The kingdom of Urartu was one of the lesser powers, yet an important domain in the region. It was centered on Lake Van, in the highlands of present-day Armenia. The kingdom rose to power in the mid 9th century BCE and was conquered by

Media in the early 6th century BCE. Urartu served as a buffer between the Cimmerians to its northeast and the kingdom of Lydia (see further below).¹⁵⁶

The Western Saka

As you recall, the Saka were divided into two groups. The Eastern Saka lived to the east of the Caspian Sea. They were the fierce warriors that harassed the Eastern Aryans, later the Part. The Western Saka lived to the west of the Caspian, mostly north of the Caucasus. They entered present-day Azerbaijan through the Darband Pass. They, too, were fierce warriors. As we shall see, their Western Aryan neighbors were a good match for them.

THE MEDES

In the ninth century BCE, the Medes, originally consisting of several communities of herders in the northwestern parts of the Caspian, migrated south and settled in the north central and western areas of the Iranian plateau. There they found themselves in the neighborhood of some very powerful centers of ancient civilization like Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam, as well as lesser powers like the Urartu. These kingdoms were constantly fighting among themselves. For instance, the Elamites would invade Babylonia and take their god, *Marduk*, to Elam. The Babylonians would fight back, defeat the Elamites, and take their god back. Their real enemy, however, were those newcomers who had designs on the resources of the area, resources that thus far had been under the sole control of Babylonia, Assyria, or both.

Under the circumstances prevailing, the Medes were forced to find strength in unity, and prosperity in organization and alliance with the more moderate powers of the region. As a result, Diaco, the owner of the largest herd in Media, gathered the chiefs of the communities together and convinced the lesser chiefs that with him they might lose their autonomy, but against him they would lose everything to the Assyrians and the Babylonians. After internal unity was achieved, Diaco allied Media with the kingdom of Urartu.

The Assyrians, who had used the forests and mines of the region without anyone questioning their authority, did everything in their power to prevent Media from becoming a major power in the region. As a first step, they captured Diaco and exiled him to Syria, one of their colonies. As a next step, they sent many Jewish families from the regions in the eastern Mediterranean to Media. Lastly, in order not to deal with the Medes directly, they made the Medes vassals of the Western Sakas who, like the Eastern Sakas, were fierce warriors, known for their ruthlessness. The Medes were powerless against the Sakas because, like the Assyrians, the Sakas had a well-equipped army. The Western Sakas felt comfortable enough in Media that they built a capital for themselves, the present-day town of Saqqez.

Diaco's exile in Syria lasted some 28 years. Eventually, he returned to Media.

When the Medians asked him to serve as their protector, he accepted. But his rule did not last long. He died shortly after he assumed power. His rule, however, was significant in that it set the precedence for the future rulership of the Median tribes.

The next ruler, Faravartish, Diako's son, continued his father's policy of paying tribute to Assyria. His major achievement was the subjugation of the Pars. His major mistake, however, was the invasion of Assyria at a time that the Median army was not strong enough to withstand, let alone defeat, the army of Assyria. He was killed in the battle against Assyria in the 22nd year of his reign.

Cyaxares (same as Uvakhshatra) became king at a very turbulent time for Media. His first step, after consolidation of power and establishment of the Kingdom of Media (625 BCE), was to reform the army. He knew, from his father's experience, that Median spears and rectangular wicker shields were not sufficient for overthrowing a mighty force such as Assyria fielded. As a result of his reforms, the Median army became a force to be reckoned with.¹⁵⁷

Having lived almost all of his life under the Saka yoke, Cyaxares knew that his kingdom would not flourish unless the Saka were neutralized. He also knew that this neutralization could not take place as a result of a military invasion. He, therefore, sought a more devious method of dealing with the problem. He invited all the leaders of the Sakas to a lavish banquet, made them drunk, and ordered his agents to slaughter them.¹⁵⁸ This move not only freed him from the slavery of the Sakas, but also placed the powerful army of the Western Sakas at his command. He organized this new army that included Western Saka warriors into a formidable army consisting of archers, spearmen, and cavalry.

Cyaxares's first encounter with the Assyrians at Nineveh was not successful. Consequently, he lowered his expectations and, in 614 BCE, invaded Assyria's second important city, Ashur. In this he was successful. Soon after this major victory, Babylonia recognized Media as a major player in the region and became an ally.

The opportunity to overthrow Assyria was now at hand. Cyaxares, therefore, created an Alliance among Media, Babylonia, and Egypt. He then led the combined forces of Media and Babylonia, with Egyptian support, against Nineveh. In 612 BCE, Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, fell. Assyria then was divided between the Medes and the Babylonians, creating two relatively large and powerful empires in the region.¹⁵⁹ The limits of Media at its zenith were as follows: the Halys River (present-day Qizil Irmağ) to the west, Babylonia to the south, Van, or later Armenia, to the north, and the land of Elam, previously a vassal of Assyria, and its own vassal, Parsa, to the east. The Medes freed the Jews to return to the Holy Land. The arrival of a monotheistic religion, believing in an afterlife, and a people who were tolerant of other creeds was welcomed.¹⁶⁰

Lydia

Lydia appears in history as a consequence of the fall of the Hittite Empire in the 12th century BCE. It is a kingdom to the west of the Halys River. The ethnic

identity of the Lydians is unknown but the inclination of the Lydians is toward the Greeks. Indeed, many of those who reached fame and fortune in ancient times rose from the cities in this part of present-day Anatolia, also referred to as Ionia.

The Cimmerians, a people like the Sakas, who harassed the Aryans, lived to the northeast of the Lydians, beyond the kingdom of Urartu. They continuously invaded Lydia, plundered its cities, and destroyed its fields. In order to stop the atrocities of the Cimmerians, the Lydians asked the Assyrians for assistance. But the Assyrians chose to ignore their request. Only when Cimmerians infringed upon Assyrian interests did Assyria punish them and, by so doing, indirectly curtail their infringement on the rights of the Lydians. This gave the Lydians the opportunity to create a tranquil life for themselves and to promote the arts for which they became famous.

After the fall of Assyria, the northern holdings of Assyria that reached the Halys River fell into the hands of the Medians. Intending to extend his domain to the Mediterranean Sea, Cyaxares invaded Lydia. But after 5 years of battle, he signed a treaty with Croesus and returned to Ecbatana. We shall discuss Croesus, a descendant of Gyges, the owner of the ring about which Plato speaks in the *Republic*, later in the context of his battle with Cyrus II the Great.

Astyages

(r. 585–550 BCE)

In 585 BCE, Astyages succeeded his father Cyaxares, who died shortly after the signing of the peace treaty between Media and Lydia. Astyages is noted for his promotion of Zoroastrianism throughout his empire, perhaps rivaling Croesus, who supported such major western philosophers as Thales of Miletus and Solon. Astyages would not have lasted on the throne of Media for thirty-two years if it were not for his father's capable administration and conquests. Astyages's rule came to an end when his own grandson, Cyrus of Anshan, later Cyrus II the Great, defeated him and made Media an inseparable part of the Persian Empire.

THE PARS

Like the Medes, the Pars were an Aryan people who came to the plateau through the western Caspian corridor and moved farther to the south than the Medes. In Anshan, circa 844 BCE, they set up a rulership of their own. During the early years of the rule of Astyages, their ruler was Cambyses I. Astyages allied himself with the Pars, and, as a token of his good will, married Princess Mandane, the daughter of Cambyses I. Cyrus II the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, was born to the couple. He is named after his grandfather Cyrus I of Anshan.¹⁶¹

THE ACHAEMENIDS

The correct dynastic line of the Achaemenids is still to be determined. The reason for the indecisiveness lies in the fact that a number of similar names are mentioned by the later Achaemenid monarchs regarding their own ancestry that cannot be easily placed in the dynastic line. What is certain is that the eponymous ancestor of the Achaemenids is Hakhamanesh or Achaemenes, whose name is a compound of *hakhi* (friend) and *manesh* (disposition, temperament) meaning “devoted to friendship.”

Achaemenes was an overlord or a clan chief, not a king. He could have been lord of a domain in the early decades of the seventh century before Christ. He might have been a vassal of the king of Media and might have mobilized the combined forces of Parsumash and Anshan against Assyria in 681 BCE.

The title of king was used for the first time in relation to the son of Achaemenes, Teispes, or Cheshpesh. He was followed by Cambyses and Cyrus, of whom we know only through later references. The Achaemenid Empire began with the son of Cambyses, Cyrus II the Great. He was followed by his son Cambyses II, the conqueror of Egypt. With the death of Cambyses II, this line of the dynasty came to an abrupt end.¹⁶²

Teispes

Teispes ruled over Anshan and Elam, both located in the present-day Khuzistan province of Iran. In the hostilities between the Elamites and the Assyrians, he remained neutral. Teispes had two sons, Cyrus and Ariaramnes, between whom he divided his kingdom at his death. It is not clear from the sources whether Ariaramnes actually ruled, even though he referred to himself as king of kings in an inscription unearthed at Hamadan:

Ariaramnes, the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, son of Teispes the King, grandson of Achaemenes. Saith Ariaramnes the King: This country Persia which I hold, which is possessed of good horses, of good men, upon me the Great God Ahuramazda bestowed (it). By the favor of Ahuramazda I am king in this country. Saith Ariaramnes the King: May Ahuramazda bear me aid.¹⁶³

Arsames, who followed Ariaramnes, also considered himself Iran’s king of kings, as is evident from his inscription at Hamadan:

Arsames, the Great King, King of Kings, King (in) Persia, son (of) Ariaramnes the King, an Achaemenian. Saith Arsames the King: Ahuramazda, great god, the greatest of gods, made me king. He bestowed on me the land Persia, with good people, with good horses. By the favor of Ahuramazda I hold this land. Me may Ahuramazda protect, and my royal house, and this land which I hold, may he protect.¹⁶⁴

The denial of kingship to both is documented in a statement by Darius I, who identifies himself as the ninth in the line of the Achaemenid kings.¹⁶⁵ No matter how this dynastic puzzle is resolved, however, there is no doubt about the great significance to be attached to the line of Ariaramnes in relation to the rise of his grandson, Darius I, especially in relation to the continuation of the Achaemenid

line.

Cyrus

Cyrus, the grandfather of Cyrus II the Great, could have ruled over both Anshan and Parsumash. And after the fall of Elam to Assyria, he could have become a vassal of the Assyrian king. The appearance of his son, Arukku, carrying tribute to the court at Nineveh is noteworthy.

Cambyses

Cambyses (Old Persian, Kambujiya) ruled Anshan during the rulership of Astyages of Media. His daughter Mandane was the wife of King Astyages of Media. Cyrus II the Great was born of that marriage.

Cyrus II the Great

(r. 559–529 BCE)

Cyrus, who belongs to a long line of tribal chiefs, was born between 590 BCE and 580 in western Iran; he ruled for 30 years. Cyrus, after consolidation of the tribes loyal to him, rebelled against his own grandfather, Astyages, the king of Media, and took over Media (550 BCE). Using the resources of Media, which included Assyria, he invaded and conquered Lydia in the western part of present-day Turkey (547 BCE). He then subjugated the provinces in the east that had belonged to Media.¹⁶⁶ His crowning achievement was the conquest of Babylonia (539 BCE). His life story is a combination of real history and myth.

Cyrus was the son-in-law of the Median king Astyages and Mandane, the daughter of Cambyses I. Astyages had a dream in which Cyrus engulfed the world. To prevent any future threat against his rule, he ordered his minister, Harpagus, to kill the infant Cyrus. Rather than kill him, Harpagus protected Cyrus and groomed him to become the king of the Persians.¹⁶⁷

In 550 BCE, Cyrus defeated Astyages's army, commanded by the same Harpagus, and expanded his small principality of Anshan to include the Median Empire. He became the *de facto* ruler of all the Iranian tribes. Control over Media put the resources of Assyria, i.e., most of Mesopotamia and eastern Asia Minor, all the gains resulting from Cyaxares's conquests, under his control. In other words, within a very short time, the principality of Anshan grew to border the kingdom of Lydia at the Halys River in the west and Balkh and Herat in the east.

In 547/46 BCE, Cyrus, divided his empire into 20 *satrapies*. Then continuing the unsuccessful efforts of Cyaxares, he moved his army into Asia Minor and challenged the Lydian king, Croesus. He sent an envoy to Croesus and advised him that rather than fight a losing battle, he should become a *satrap* of the Persian Empire.¹⁶⁸ But Croesus was already certain of his own victory in the war. He had sent a messenger to the Delphic Oracle and the Oracle had said: "Go tell the king if he crosses the river, he will destroy an empire." What Croesus didn't know was that the Oracle had meant the destruction of his own, rather than the newly formed

empire of the Persians.

The battle between Cyrus and Croesus went badly for Croesus. Croesus fled to hide behind his impregnable fortifications in Sardis, burning Lydian villages behind him. His hope was that Cyrus would return to Persia for winter and come back the next year to continue the war. But he was mistaken. Cyrus continued the war, captured Sardis, and carried Croesus and his family to Ecbatana.¹⁶⁹

After the fall of Sardis, the Lydian capital, some Lydian cities, like Miletus, capitulated to the Persians, while others, like Ephesus and Colophon, resisted Persian domination. Those cities, too, were eventually reduced. This was the first contact between the Iranians and the Greeks. From this time on, Greeks and Persians had to live together and learn each other's ways.

Following the conquest of Lydia and the cities on the Asian coast, Cyrus moved to the east. He placed Hystaspes, Darius's father, as *satrap* of Hyrcania and Parthia. Then, before he left, he also assigned *satraps* to Darangiana, Arachosia, Margiana, and Bactria.¹⁷⁰

The conquest of Babylonia was easy. Cyrus diverted the waters of the Euphrates and used the dry riverbed for entry into Babylon, bypassing the city's massive fortifications. Babylonia fell to Cyrus in 539 BCE. Additionally, the Babylonians were dissatisfied with their current ruler and unhappy that Babylonia no longer enjoyed the assistance of Lydia, which itself was now a Persian *satrapy*.

Cyrus claimed to have been appointed by the god *Marduk* to rule Babylon.¹⁷¹ He treated the Babylonians with respect. When leaving for the eastern parts of his realm, he placed his son, Cambyses, later Cambyses II, in charge with the mandate to make preparations for the conquest of Egypt.¹⁷²

For five years, Cyrus fought the nomadic tribes (Massagetae of Scythia), captured most of their domain, and subjugated them to Persian rule. But at the end, he was killed. Queen Tomyris, whose son had been killed by Cyrus, decapitated Cyrus, dipped the head in human blood, and said, "I live and have conquered you in fight, and yet by you am I ruined, for you took my son with guile; but thus I make good my threat and give you your fill of blood!"¹⁷³ Cyrus's body was brought to Pasargadae and was buried at a place called Murghab. He was 61 years old.

Towards the end of his life, Cyrus had great plans for Iran. Having brought the military might of Assyria and Media, the gold mines of Lydia, and the cultural heritage of Babylonia under his control, he looked forward to invading Egypt. By transforming the fertile lands on the banks of the Nile into an Iranian granary and by spending Lydian gold for recruiting soldiers, Cyrus was on the verge of raising the largest army possible for the conquest of the rest of the known world (cf., Alexander the Great).

Cyrus and the Jews

The history of the Jews in Iran dates back to 727 BCE when Tiglath-pileser of Assyria resettled thousands of Jews, from the region of present-day Israel, in Media, the northwestern regions of present-day Iran. During the time of Sargon II, an uprising by the Jews in Ashod and Samaria (721 BCE) resulted in

the resettlement of more Jews in Media. The capital city of Ecbatana, and Susa, accommodated another 27,290. In 680 BCE, as a result of the repressive measures of Nabuchadadnezzer II of Assyria, more Jews sought sanctuary in Media. They were settled in the region of present-day Isfahan.

In 539 BCE, Cyrus the Great captured Babylonia and freed the Jews who were enslaved there. He gave them the option of either returning to their homeland or migrating to Iran. Some returned to Jerusalem, but many chose to remain within the domain of the Persian Empire. Cyrus's tolerance of other faiths than his own played a major part in the decision of the freed Jews.

In general, Cyrus's government, and the governments that followed, encouraged autonomy in internal affairs for conquered people. It was not unusual, for instance, to find semi-autonomous temple communities in areas where the Jews had settled. In this regard, special Jewish courts settled monetary and property disputes in Jewish communities. Some of the practices in these courts influenced Persian administrators so that they utilized some of the cultural, legal, and administrative traditions that they felt responded well to their needs.

The capture of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians is prophesized in Daniel 5:24–28. Cyrus's deeds are recorded in several different places in the Bible: 2 Chronicles 36:22–23, Isaiah 45, and Ezra 1:1–4. In 2 Chronicles 36:22–23, we read:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he make a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it into writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"

Cyrus the Great was a warrior king and a nation builder. He intended to settle the semi-nomadic Mede and Persian tribes and familiarize them with the ways of the settled people. He wanted to do that by continuing the administrative practices of the Medes, and by avoiding introduction of drastic changes in the cultures of his subject peoples. He intended to respect the gods of other nations and repatriate displaced peoples. In this regard, for instance, he allowed the 40,000 Jews held in captivity in Babylon to go back to their homeland.

For his own people, he provided security, a sense of nationhood, and a network of trade relations. He created laws, recognized the rights of individuals, and respected different people's religions, languages, and cultures. In the words of Xenophon, "Even in his boyhood, grown men were captivated by Cyrus's wisdom, resilient spirit, guilelessness, and physical beauty."¹⁷⁴

Cyrus II had three wives. Kasandan brought him two sons: Cambyzes and Bardia. Amitis brought him two daughters: Atossa and Mereue. A third wife, whose name is not known, gave him a daughter, Artsitun.

Family relations, as we shall see, played a major role in the direction that the socio-political developments of future Iranian lands would take. For instance, Vishtasp, son of Arsham and cousin to Cyrus II, married Rodogun and had five sons: Darius, Ardavan, Artafarn, Hutana, and Artanes, and two daughters. Were it not for Darius, who killed the false Bardia, for instance, what direction would the empire have taken?

Cambyses II

(r. 529–521 BCE)

Cyrus the Great had two sons, Cambyses and Bardia. After the fall of Babylonia, when Cyrus went to the eastern marches to deal with the Scythians, he left Cambyses as *satrap* of Babylonia.¹⁷⁵ Cambyses remained in that position for eight years. Following Cyrus's advice, he retained the Babylonian dignitaries in their positions and respected them. After Cyrus, he became king and ruled for eight years. Cambyses was a very different king than Cyrus. He had inherited some of Cyrus's administrative and military capabilities but not any of his popularity, wisdom, and grace.

Before the time of Cambyses II, the century-long Nubian domination of Egypt had given way to the overlordship of the Assyrians. Being in constant conflict with the Medes and the Babylonians in Mesopotamia, the Assyrians had entrusted the rulership of Egypt to a line of Egyptian pharaohs beginning with Pharaoh Psamtik I (664–610 BCE), followed by Pharaoh Necho (610–595 BCE). During the rule of Pharaoh Amasis (570–526 BCE), Media, Assyria, Babylonia, and Lydia had all become *satrapies* in the sprawling Persian Empire. The shift in power had given Egypt a degree of autonomy.

Rather than with Assyria, the Pharaoh Amasis had to deal with Cambyses II. He might have been able to strike a deal with the Persian monarch and survive, but he did not find the opportunity. He died at exactly the same time that Persian forces were moving in the direction of Egypt. It fell on the young Pharaoh Psamtik III (526–525 BCE) to deal with the situation.

Obviously Egypt, a recent vassal of former Assyria, was not a match for Persia. Psamtik III put up a good fight but, in the end, was defeated by Cambyses II at Pelusium. He fled to Memphis only to be caught and transported to Persia. Cambyses II became the first Iranian pharaoh of Egypt (525 BCE).

Ancient Egyptians became familiar with the name of Cyrus the Great as the father of Cambyses II at this time. They revered Cyrus for his greatness but never wrote his name in a *cartouche* because he had never been the pharaoh of Egypt.¹⁷⁶ They wrote Cambyses's name in a *cartouche* and referred to him as *Mesutire* "Offspring of Re."¹⁷⁷

After he became king, Cambyses II spent three years in putting down the revolts of unruly *satraps*, as well as devoted time to the preparations for the invasion of Egypt. The true reasons for Cambyses's invasion are not known. Opinions vary, including three espoused by Herodotus that need not be reiterated here.¹⁷⁸ It is clear, however, that Cambyses spent a great deal of time and effort on

preparation for the Egyptian campaign (528–525 BCE). He wondered whether he should invade by land or by sea. If by land, he wondered how to supply his army, especially with water. Eventually, he decided to invade by land and made arrangements with the Arab tribes in the Sinai to supply him with provisions.¹⁷⁹

According to Darius I, Cambyses II had a brother, Bardia.¹⁸⁰ He was the governor of the lands to the east (Khurasan). Cambyses did not trust Bardia and did not want to leave him in Iran while he himself went on an extended expedition. Before leaving for Egypt (526 BCE), therefore, he secretly murdered Bardia.¹⁸¹

In Egypt, prior to the capture of Memphis, Cambyses fought the Egyptians valiantly. After the young pharaoh Psamtik III, who had recently succeeded Amazis, was defeated at Pelusium, Cambyses moved to Memphis. There, he took over the pharaoh's role, sought a temple priest to instruct him in the manners of the Egyptians, and exiled Psamtik III to Susa.¹⁸² He also accepted tribute from Lybia, which had surrendered to Cambyses on its own.¹⁸³

Using Thebes as his center of operations, Cambyses undertook two major expeditions: he dispatched an army of 50,000 men to capture the Oasis of Amon (at Siwa). This force got lost in the desert and not a single man returned. He himself led the rest of the army to Ethiopia. The Ethiopians confronted Cambyses with a force that he had not expected and forced him to retreat.

Forced retreat, however, was not Cambyses's only problem. Before leaving for Ethiopia, for whatever reason, he had failed to see to the acquisition of necessary supplies for his troops. As a result, he faced a major logistical problem to the point that some of the men in his army could have resorted to cannibalism.

Historical documents from Egypt indicate that initially Cambyses II treated the Egyptians with the same magnanimity that his father had treated the Babylonians. The Egyptians, too, reciprocated; they called him the pharaoh of United Egypt.¹⁸⁴ Cambyses's goodwill, however, did not pass the test of time.¹⁸⁵ Several factors marred Cambyses's goodwill: one was the loss of 50,000 troops to the sands of the desert; another was his inability to capture Ethiopia as he had planned; and a third was the impossibility of annexing Africa to his empire. All these made Cambyses very upset as he entered Memphis.

In Memphis, on the day of his arrival, the Egyptians were celebrating the discovery of a new sacred *Apis* Bull.¹⁸⁶ Cambyses, interpreting the festivity as the Egyptians' reaction to his defeat in Ethiopia, lost all control.¹⁸⁷ In retaliation, he ordered the celebrations stopped. Then he proceeded to stab the *Apis* Bull mortally.¹⁸⁸ Following that, he burned the mummy of Pharaoh Amazis, destroyed a number of temples, killed many temple priests, killed 12 Iranian generals, shot the 11-year-old son of his own major commander, and killed his own sister-wife, who was pregnant at the time.¹⁸⁹ These events prompted Cambyses II to end his Egyptian campaign and head for home. Before leaving Egypt, he appointed Ariand (also Ariandes) as the *satrap* of Egypt.¹⁹⁰

En route to Iran, news arrived from the heartland that his brother, Bardia, had usurped the throne! The usurper had gone so far as to implement reforms that exempted the people from paying taxes for three years and abolishing military

conscription. More important, he had confiscated the property of the rich and distributed it among the common people.

On his way back to Iran, Cambyses stopped at a place called Egbatana,¹⁹¹ in present-day Syria. There, he died under mysterious conditions. According to some accounts, he committed suicide. According to others, a conspiracy resulted in his death. Darius's words in his Behistun relief are, "He died his own death," whatever that means. His death, however, was not sudden. He lived long enough to confess that he had killed Bardia and that the person on the throne was an imposter.

Cambyses had four wives. They are Faidim; Atossa, Cyrus's daughter; Mereue, also Cyrus's daughter; and Nitetis, possibly the daughter of the pharaoh of Egypt. Bardia had a daughter called Parmisse.

As a person, Cambyses II left much to be desired. He drank heavily and killed his own sister-wife by kicking her when she was pregnant. He did not appreciate either the depth of the Egyptian culture or the sacred nature of fire in the Iranian culture. His burning of the mummy of the pharaoh Amazis speaks to both those aspects. He shot the son of an attendant to demonstrate his skill at archery, buried twelve Persian nobles alive on trifling charges and, at Memphis, stabbed the sacred *Apis* Bull.

The *Apis* Bull

Apis was a sacred bull deity worshiped in Memphis. He was the *Ka* (power/life force) of Ptah as well as a symbol of the pharaoh embodying the qualities of kingship. The Greeks identified *Apis* with Epaphus, the son of Io. Herodotus reports that the death of Cambyses II and his mortally wounding the *Apis* Bull were related. After its death, the *Apis* Bull became Osorapis or Osiris *Apis*. The *Apis* Bull had the following identification marks: a white triangle upon its forehead, a white vulture wing outline on its back, a scarab mark under its tongue, a white crescent moon shape on its right flank, and double hairs on its tail.

The *Apis* Bull, conceived by a ray from heaven, lived in a special house. His movements were watched carefully for important signs and his death was mourned. The burial of *Apis* was costly and finding a new one was time consuming. The search ended in rejoicing for all Egyptians.

About the stabbing of the *Apis* Bull, Herodotus says the following, "When the priests returned, bringing the sacred *Apis* Bull with them, Cambyses, like the harebrained person that he was, drew his dagger, and aimed at the belly of the animal, but missed his mark and stabbed him in the thigh ... he ordered those whose business it was to scourge the priests, and if they found any of the Egyptians keeping festival to put them to death."¹⁹²

As a ruler, he was a despot. He deprived his enemy of his afterlife, contaminated the sacred fire, and killed many Egyptian temple priests and prominent Iranians. He desecrated temples and mocked the gods of ancient Egypt.

Cambyses's stay in Egypt was short and violent. He showed no real appreciation of Egyptian culture. He even angered many of his own people, especially when he burned the mummy of his archenemy, the pharaoh Amazis.¹⁹³ The act not only

deprived the pharaoh of his afterlife, but also contaminated the sacred fire that Zoroastrians revered.

THE TRIPLE-ATEF CROWN

In his discussion of the origin of the *khvarnah*, Soudavar refers to Egyptian art as one of the sources of Iranian iconography. The ram and its relation to the winged solar disk, the lotus flower as a symbol of regeneration, and Akhenaton's flying ribbons symbolizing life imparted by Aten are examples of this interchange.¹⁹⁴ Digging deeper into this relationship, perhaps to the beginning of the involvement of the Iranians in Egyptian culture, we come across a new iconography, the *hemhem*, or the triple-*Atef* crown of Osiris, the eldest son of Nut. It is a white crown decorated with two ostrich feathers. The *hemhem* is the pharaonic crown that combines three *atef* crowns. It is protected by two *uraeses* (cobras) at the bottom. They peak out from the two sides. The *hemhem* was first worn by the pharaoh Akhenaton and later on by Iput (754–715 BCE), one of the four rulers who came to power during the transition from Libyan to Nubian rule.

During the excavations at Pasargadae, a stele was uncovered that depicted a ruler of Iran with a triple *hemhem* headgear. The headgear looks exactly like those worn by Akhenaten and Iput.

For a long time the depiction on the stele was referred to as “The Winged Genius.”¹⁹⁵ But after the publication of an article by Mallowan in *Cambridge History of Iran*, it was changed to “Cyrus the Great.” Today both names are acceptable. However, there is a historical problem with the appellation. Cyrus never captured Egypt. He captured Babylon. He left the capture of Egypt for his son. Mallowan attributes the headgear to Cyrus II and identifies it as an imitation of the headgear of Assyrian kings. He states that at some point the stele had carried the name of Cyrus the Great.¹⁹⁶ That could be an answer. Assyria, too, was a part of Cyrus's empire. But the question remains: Why would Cyrus, who was not a conqueror of Assyria, adorn his headgear as if he were the conqueror of Assyria? Furthermore, why should his Assyrian headgear carry the *uraeses* of Egyptian rulers?

The figure wearing the triple-*Atef* crown might be Cambyses II, the conqueror of Egypt. He was the first Iranian pharaoh of Egypt and as such, the first Iranian eligible to wear the *hemhem* crown. It could also be a depiction of any of the other Iranian pharaohs of Egypt after Cambyses, but none of them seems to have deviated from wearing the nomadic headgear worn by Darius I.¹⁹⁷

Darius I the Great

(r. 522–486 BCE)

Darius I the Great (henceforth Darius) ruled for thirty-six years. He was born in 550 BCE, most likely in the eastern regions of the present-day independent republics of Central Asia. He died in 486 BCE at Persepolis. His name is a

compound of *Dara* (possessor) and *Vohu* (good), meaning “he who is innately good.” He was the son of Hystaspes (Vishtasp), grandson of Arsames, and great-grandson of Ariaramnes of the line of Achaemenes. During the reign of Cambyses II, he was the *satrap* of Parthia and Hyrcania.

As a youth, Darius was ambitious. Cyrus suspected him of treason, even though Darius was about 20 years old at Cyrus’s death. When Cambyses invaded Egypt, Darius accompanied the monarch and commanded the prestigious Immortals. He also served as the king’s spearbearer and bodyguard (528–525 BCE).

Cambyses was absent from Persia for four years. Eight months prior to Cambyses’s death, a Magi called Gaumata had placed himself on the throne, and by exempting the people from taxes and military service, as well as by confiscating the property of the nobles and distributing it among the common people, he had gained the good will of the masses. Upon hearing the news of the death of Cambyses, Darius hastens to Persia to claim the Achaemenid throne by divine right. As a first step, aided by a party of six noblemen, his father-in-law Gobryas among them, he invaded the palace and put an end to Gaumata’s rule (519 BCE).¹⁹⁸ Thus, at the age of twenty-eight, he had the potential of becoming the King of Kings of Persia and the Pharaoh of Egypt.

While Cyrus II and Cambyses II both carried the divine right (*farr*) to rule, Darius was not so endowed. His claim to the Achaemenid throne, therefore, needed divine sanction. This was apparent from the activities of the many *satrapies* that rose up against him. Each *satrap* wanted to govern his *satrapy* independent of the central government. To prove that he was the true successor to the throne of Achaemenes, Darius married Atossa, Cyrus the Great’s daughter (cf., Egyptian practice of marrying the right woman). To show that *Ahura Mazda* sanctioned his rule, and to gain the benevolence and the support of the Persian people, he took on every *satrap* who rose up against him. In all, he fought nineteen battles during the same year.¹⁹⁹

Historic Farr (see also Cosmic Khvarnah and Mythic Farr)

Recall that cosmic *khvarnah* consisted of three forces: creation, propagation, and protection. In the mythic world, these forces were invested in three lords, *Ahura Mazda*, *Mithra*, and *Apam-Napat*, respectively.¹ In historic times, the *farr* is the single sacred driving force behind kingship. It serves as the basis of a social hierarchy, dictated by the creator. Called the *Ahuric Order*, the hierarchy flows from *Mazda* to all beings in such a manner that the ruler has the most *farr* and the lower ranks possess increasingly less. The lowest rank, the prisoner of war, ends up with virtually no *farr*. Each individual’s *farr* is protected. It cannot be taken by force.² Legitimate claimants of *farr* will have to prove their claim, usually in the course of single combat. The claimant who is supported by the deity is invariably victorious. However, the receiver of the *farr* does not become divine. He becomes sacrosanct. He is beyond criticism.

Unlike cosmic and mythic *farr*, historic *farr*, because of the possibility of multiple manifestations, is complex. As Soudavar indicates, these

manifestations cover both pre-Islamic and Islamic times. Different cultures and different rulers manifest their *farr* in a particular manner exclusive to themselves.³ The Achaemenids, for instance, use many more ways of displaying their *farr* than the Sassanids. The essence of what they display, however, is the same.

1 See Soudavar, pp. 52–55.

2 Cf., for the universality of *farr*, see Soudavar, pp. 2–3, 7, 23–25.

3 For discussion, see Soudavar, *passim*.

A bas-relief, commemorating his efforts for the unification of Iran, speaks for itself:

Saith Darius the King: “This is what I did by the favor of Ahuramazda in one and the same year after that I became king. XIX battles I fought; by the favor of Ahuramazda I smote them and took prisoner IX kings ...”²⁰⁰

When tranquility was established in the empire, and he was recognized as the King of Kings of Iran, he ordered the creation of a gigantic bas-relief at Behistun, commemorating the end of his ordeal. The relief depicts the nine rebel rulers standing, crest-fallen, before the king. The king has his foot on the slain Gaumata.²⁰¹ *Ahura Mazda*, the king’s helper and embodiment of legitimacy, hovers above the assembly.²⁰² It should be mentioned that the revolt in Babylonia gave Darius a hard time. The other revolts were not any less difficult either, especially because they happened successively in distant places from each other and that they had to be dealt with swiftly. In suppressing these revolts, Darius used excessive force and a degree of cruelty that was unusual for him. The Scythians were the last of the rebels to be brought into the fold. In fact, to prevent any further disturbances in the east by the Scythians, who had killed Cyrus II, Darius pushed them all the way back into Sughdiana. We see the Scythian rebel leader, with his conic, long hat, at the end of the line of prisoners.

The bas-relief at Behistun embodies a unique feature. For the presentation of the relief, Darius commissioned a group of scholars to devise a script with which to write Old Persian. The script created, although laconic, is adequate enough to make the kingdom less dependent on Babylonian, Elamite, and Aramaic scripts that were normally used to render such edicts. The languages on the Behistun relief are Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite. The text informs the spectator that the rebellious provinces included Persia, Elam, Media, Assyria, Egypt, Parthia, Margiana, and Scythia.

This, however, was the Iranian side of the Empire. Darius I was also the pharaoh of Egypt. He had to make himself known to the Egyptians and make sure that they understood that he was a good and appropriate pharaoh for them, one who could assist them to resurrect. We shall deal with Pharaoh Darius I later.

Early in his rule, Darius captured the fertile Indus Valley, commissioned a Carian (Scylax) to survey the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, visited Egypt as king, ordered the codification of Egyptian laws, which took fifteen years to complete, and ordered the completion of a canal that had been started by Necho II (520–515

BCE).

In 517 BCE, when he heard that Ariand, the governor of Egypt, who had been appointed by Cambyes II, had been maltreating the populace, he traveled to Egypt and had Ariand put to death.²⁰³ In general, however, he showed a great deal of interest in Egyptian life and culture.²⁰⁴ In fact, he tried very hard to create an understanding between the people of the ancient kingdom and the semi-nomadic people of his own newly formed empire. The Egyptians obliged by helping him realize some of his dreams, among them the possibility of acquiring immortality.²⁰⁵

Darius lived at a time when men thought it possible to unify the world and to rule it with justice. Duty-bound to expand Zoroastrianism, he also felt obliged to subjugate the city-states of Greece and put an end to their intrigue in Persian possessions in Asia Minor. In 513 BCE, he crossed the Bosphorus on a bridge of boats and the Danube and pushed the Scythians so far into Europe that he himself had to abandon the campaign for a lack of provisions. Persian *satraps* subjugated Thrace and Macedonia. His return to Persia, however, did not preclude a systematic invasion of Attica and Sparta at a later date.

Darius's decision to return to Persia was wise because, at the time, he lacked sufficient information to formulate a coherent strategy against the Greek city-states. Intelligence on the naval capability of Greece was especially crucial. Without it, Darius could not address the question of logistics or establish a stable supply line between his land army and his navy. He needed a better equipped and a stronger military and naval force than Persia possessed at the time. He also had to make sure that subject nations like Ionia, Egypt, and Babylonia would support his plans.

In Persia, Darius concentrated his energy on administration. He knew that through administration he could provide a successful defense for the East and that a good and just administration would produce a grateful citizenry. This latter, he thought, was instrumental in not only contributing to the formation of a good fighting force, but also in enabling him to acquire adequate provision for them.

Darius's forte was administration. In this regard, he allowed his subjects to retain their languages, religions, and cultures. He also instituted the rule of justice under the Divine Right of Kings and reformed the tax system. The amount of tax was measured by ability to pay and by the yield of the land. Additionally, he standardized weights and measures, as well as instituted pay for soldiers and training for the military.

To boost the economic well being of the nation, he furthered the utilization of the mineral wealth of Persia. Following the example of the Lydians, he introduced a Persian monetary system based on the *darik*,²⁰⁶ to replace payment in kind. This then served as a simple system of banking whereby wealth from the royal court could flow into the hands of the people. More money in the hands of the people meant a better system of *qanats*,²⁰⁷ leading to better canals and harvests. His attention to better roads led to more trade and, in the long run, a more unified kingdom.

In his quest for a just and efficient administration, Darius revamped the *satrap* system introduced by Cyrus the Great, raising the number of *satrapies* from 20 to 28.²⁰⁸

The *satrapies* were connected to the center by the Royal Road. On this road, 1,677 miles in length, 111 stations were in operation, each able to provide fresh horses to the *chapar* or the messengers of the king.²⁰⁹ In nine days, the messengers covered the distance between Sardis and Susa, usually crossed by the Silk Route caravans over the course of three months. A similar road connected Babylon to the Indus Valley.²¹⁰

The Satrapies

In a *satrapy*, the *satrap* was chosen from among the Persians of royal blood. Each *satrapy* was administered by five royal appointees. At the top was a governor or *satrap* who, aided by a state secretary, organized the affairs of the *satrapy*. The secretary had a small army attached to his office. When needed, he could mobilize this army and unseat an ambitious *satrap*. There were also a tax collector, a military general, and an individual referred to as the “eyes and ears” of the king. This officer kept the king abreast of the goings-on in his part of the empire and reported on abuses of power and activities that bordered on treason. To make sure that the financial books in the *satrapy* were in order at all times, an unexpected inspector arrived from the central government, examined the books, and filed a report at court. This assured the king that all was well.¹

1 For a list of the satrapies and the amount of tax each paid, see Herodotus, III, 90–94; and Ghirshman, 1965, p. 144. For countries that sent gifts to the court of Darius, see Herodotus III, 95–97.

The Egyptian rulers Senusret I (1771–1726 BCE) and Thutmose III (1504–1450 BCE) were fully aware of the military and commercial significance of connecting the Nile River to the Red Sea. A bitter-water lake between the river and the sea facilitated the connection. The first pharaoh to actually undertake the project was Necho II (610–595 BCE). His project, which was completed by Darius I, opened the way for trade between western Mediterranean countries and the east as far as India. The Pelusium branch of the Nile, at Bubastis, was connected to the Great Bitter Lake by a canal going through Wadi Tumilat. The lake then was connected to the Red Sea via a shorter canal. The canal was 100 miles long. In its construction, 2,613 million cubic feet of earth was moved, 600 million cubic feet on land and 2,013 million cubic feet dredged from water. The canal facilitated the movement of troops and provisions and was also beneficial for promoting commerce. It connected Persia and Egypt directly to the East Asian markets, especially India. A memorial tablet of pink granite in multiple languages commemorates the completion of the canal. It reads:

Saith Darius the King: “I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt; I gave order to dig this canal from a river by name Nile which flows in Egypt, to the sea which goes from Persia. Afterward this canal was dug thus as I had ordered, and ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia thus as was my desire.”²¹¹

Another commemorative tablet left by Darius was discovered during the excavations at the end of the 19th century. That tablet will be discussed further below.

The Suez Canal

After the fall of the Achaemenids, Ptolemy II (ca. 250 BCE) and the Roman Emperor Trajan (98–117 CE) restored the canal, and it was in use until the rise of Islam. In the 8th century, the canal was put out of commission by Caliph al-Mansur (754–775 CE). After the discovery of trade routes around Africa, the canal lost its importance altogether and went out of use.

Persepolis was the crown of this religious and humane king's building projects. It was built as a showcase to meld the peoples of the vast empire together. Foreign dignitaries, who arrived in Persepolis to congratulate the king on the occasion of the *Nowruz*, could appreciate the contributions of their people to the empire. Babylonian bricklayers, Median and Egyptian goldsmiths and designers, and carpenters from Ionia and Caria had worked together, building and decorating the palace with cedar from Lebanon, ivory from Ethiopia, turquoise from Khwarazm, and gold from Lydia. What is important is that these monuments were not built using slave labor. Tablets discovered at Persepolis indicate that during the rule of Xerxes I, everyone who worked for the king was paid. The rates at which men, women, and children were paid for their labor is documented as follows:

12 men each 3 *shekels* and $3/4$ *shekel*[212](#)

11 boys 2 *shekels* and $1/2$

11 boys 1 *shekel* and $3/4$ & $1/8$

13 boys 1 *shekel* and $1/4$

15 boys $1/2$ *shekels* and $1/8$

78 women 2 *shekels* and $1/2$

12 girls 1 *shekel* and $3/4$ & $1/8$

18 girls 1 *shekel* and $1/4$

20 girls 2 *shekels* and $1/8$ [213](#)

The internal problems of the empire, however, were not easily masked by such shows of splendor. Breakaway *satrapies*, like Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt had to be brought back into the fold. And, of course, this feat was not easily achieved due to the encouragement and support that those *satrapies* received from the city-states of Greece.

The Invasion of Scythia

The exact reason for Darius's invasion of Scythia is yet to be determined. Perhaps he felt that preventing the transfer of wheat from the north to Greece might weaken Greece and prepare it to submit to him. The invasion also would test the loyalty of the islands along the Aegean coast that belonged to the King of Kings.

The invasion began with building a bridge of boats across the Bosphorus. Using this bridge, the army crossed to Europe and moved along the shore of the Black Sea to the mouth of the Danube. Another bridge was built on the Danube. When his land and sea forces were assembled, Darius began his invasion. The Scythians,

being nomads, fled before Darius's army, taking Darius deeper and deeper into their own territory.

The Scythian stratagem alarmed Darius. Fearing that he might run out of provisions for the army (cf., Cambyses II's Ethiopian campaign) while still chasing the nomads, he decided to abort the chase and return to Asia. Fortunately, the Miletians, in spite of the insistence of the Ionians that the bridge should be dismantled, had not destroyed the bridge on the Danube.

Darius I's Invasion of Greece

Darius I's invasion of Greece is his response to an uprising in Ionia. Ionia came under Persian rule after Cyrus the Great defeated King Croesus of Lydia and ordered his commanders to bring the Greek cities, today the western coast of Turkey, into the fold. Originally settled by mainland Greeks in the fourth century, Ionia was a burgeoning center of culture and trade. Homer, the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, was born in Ionia, as was Sappho, who wrote about her merchant brother's adventures in Egypt. Many major figures in the sciences came from Ionia. Thales of Miletus (? 585), Anaximander of Miletus (610–546), Anaximenes of Miletus (? 546), Xenophanes of Colophon (? 570–480), Pythagoras of Samos (? 570–495), and Heracleitus of Ephesus (? 540–480), as well as a long list of other contributors to world civilization came from these parts.

Darius's invasion of Greece began when Miletus, assisted by a fleet consisting of fifteen to twenty Athenian and five Eretrian ships, revolted against Persian rule and overthrew Artaphernes, the Persian *satrap* in Sardis, and set fire to the city of Sardis. Darius sent a considerable naval force to Ionia and, after six years of on and off fighting, suppressed the revolt (494 BCE) in the Battle of Lade.

In order to teach the Greeks a lesson that they should not interfere in Iranian affairs, in 492 BCE, Darius sent his son-in-law Mardonius on an expedition to Macedonia and the Island of Thasos. Although Mardonius added a number of city-states to the Empire, his mission ended in failure. A storm at Mount Athos destroyed his entire fleet and forced him to end the expedition.

In 490 BCE, Darius sent a force of nearly 20,000, commanded by the Median Datis and Artaphernes, to Athens. This force crossed the Aegean Sea, captured Eretria, and sent its inhabitants to mainland Persia. On its way to Athens, it was confronted with a force of 10,000 at the Pass of Marathon.

The Persian fleet was divided. The major part of it was assigned to fight at Artemisium. The rest carried a cavalry force to be deployed as soon as the actual battle began. This force was to circle the coast of Athens and deploy the cavalry on the west side of Athens. The Athenian land force, under the commander Miltiades, defeated the Persian land force and immediately marched to Athens to confront the Persian cavalry.

The Battle of Marathon was Darius I's last battle. He had hoped to include Greece in his Empire and give it to Mardonius to rule. While there was still hope for Mardonius to become the *satrap* of Greece, Darius I's death denied him his third expedition against Greece.

This defeat emboldened the Persian *satrapies* to continue their revolt against the King of Kings to the point that in 486 BCE, Egypt tried to overthrow its Persian *satrap*. In the same year, Darius the Great died. He was buried in *Naqsh-e Rostam*, in a valley that accommodates the tombs of most of the members of the Achaemenid royal family.

Pharaoh Darius

Thus far we have looked at Darius as the King of Kings of Iran. His activities and behavior as king are the same as the kings who preceded him, i.e., Astyages, Cyrus, and Cambyses. However, as pharaoh of Egypt, Darius approached rulership somewhat differently and undertook tasks in the manner of Egypt's great pharaohs. In what follows, an attempt will be made at understanding Darius as an Egyptian pharaoh and to see whether his role as pharaoh of Egypt matched his role as the King of Kings of Iran.

Darius considered Egypt an integral part of his kingdom. In that respect, he was very different from the Achaemenid monarchs who followed him and who viewed Egypt only as a source of revenue for the sprawling Empire. Like the Egyptian pharaohs, Darius undertook massive building programs such as the canal at Suez, a massive bas-relief at Behistun, a spectacular tomb at *Naqsh-e Rostam*, and a splendid palace at Persepolis. None of the later Achaemenids succeeded in harnessing the resources of Egypt, natural or human, to work for the prosperity of the kingdom as did Darius. The reason is, perhaps, because none of the Achaemenid rulers who followed Darius understood the importance of the concept of *ma'at* in Egyptian life, especially the eternal bond that it created among the gods, the pharaohs, and the Egyptian populace.

Darius learned from the temple priests that the Egyptians took every possible action not to upset the natural order of things, i.e., to maintain *ma'at* in their world. He further learned that failure to maintain *ma'at* on the part of individuals, or society as a whole, could result in divine intervention. This was significant for him to know because unlike in Iran, where he was a deputy of *Abura Mazda*, in Egypt he was both a man and a god. This meant that in addition to possessing the *farr*, he had to serve as a primary upholder and maintainer of justice.

The Rules of *Ma'at*

The land of Egypt is sacred.

The name of the individual is sacred (Egyptians had two names).

Egyptians who die abroad might lose their identity and not resurrect.

The pharaoh is always a man.

The pharaoh must be strong.

He must be physically and mentally fit to lead the nation.

In battle, he must lead the army personally.

Egyptian women should not marry foreigners.

All foreigners are inferior to Egyptians.

In the same way that he created a stele in Iran proper, at *Behistun*, to show that *Abura Mazda* supported him, he created a stele in Egypt to show that he stood

shoulder to shoulder with pharaohs Amunhotep III and Ramesses II. The Suez Canal stele, written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Assyrian on one side, and Egyptian on the other, very clearly illustrates the two worlds of Darius. On the Persian side, he is the King of Kings of Iran and the deputy of *Ahura Mazda* on earth. On the Egyptian side, he is the son of *Nut*. Except for the name Darius that appears on both sides of the stele, it would be impossible to know that the texts describe the same person. The Iranian side reads as follows:

Section 1 ... A great god is Ahura Mazda who created the yonder sky, who created this earth, who created man, who bestowed mirth to human, who made Darius king, who enabled Darius to become the king of a country that is big and which has good horses and good men.

Section 2 ... I am Darius, the great king, king of kings, king of a land populated by many different races, king of this large land and beyond, son of Vishtasp, the Achaemenid.

Section 3 ... Saith Darius the King: I am a Persian; from Persia I seized Egypt; I gave order to dig this canal from a river by name Nile which flows in Egypt, to the sea which goes from Persia. Afterward this canal was dug thus as I had ordered, and ships went from Egypt through this canal to Persia thus as was my desire.²¹⁴

The side in ancient Egyptian treats Darius (Antaryush) as a pharaoh, with scant reference to his Persian identity and rulership:

Antaryush (Darius), who is the offspring of *Nut*,²¹⁵ accomplished all that the gods had started ... Master of all, who encompasses the face of the sun, when he was still in his mother's womb and had not descended to earth, *Nut* called him her own son ... commanded him ... stretched her arm that carried the bow in his direction to annihilate his enemies, as she had done for her own son, *Re* ... he is magnificent. He eliminates his enemies in all lands. Antaryush, the king of Lower and Upper Egypt, is immortal. Great king, son of the Achaemenid Vishtaspa. He is the son of *Nut*. He is magnanimous and world conquering. All in foreign lands bring gifts to him and manage his affairs ...²¹⁶

From this point on, the stele is damaged and the text is unreadable. On ancient steles, usually the same text is written in several languages. The Rosetta stone, for instance, is in Greek, as well as in two Egyptian writing systems: Demotic and Hieroglyphic. By reading the Greek, the reader will have a good sense of what the Egyptian says and can amend the shortcomings of one text by supplying the missing information from the other. The Suez Canal stele does not allow that, pointing to the fact that Darius was talking to two different audiences, using the language of each to relate to that particular audience. In other words, he wanted to be the King of Kings to the Iranians and the Pharaoh, who has the power to resurrect those who maintain *ma'at*, to the Egyptians. The *mu'bad*s and the temple priests facilitated this task for Darius by showing him how the Iranian *Ahuric* Order, based on the *farr*, and the Egyptian concept of *ma'at* could be combined to bring his kingdom untold prosperity.

A study of the ancient Nubians' attitude towards rulership was instructive for Darius. The Nubians, who had ruled in Egypt before Darius, thought that by building symbolic pyramids on the graves of their kings, they could convey to the ordinary Egyptian that they were maintaining *ma'at*.²¹⁷ But early in his rule, Darius realized that maintaining *ma'at* was not so much in the building projects that a pharaoh undertook as it was in what those structures stood for, especially in terms of rituals and prayers, and in relation to their overall impact on the lives of the pharaoh and his subjects.²¹⁸ In other words, the acceptance of the pharaoh at the court of *Osiris* and his resurrection had immense consequences for the pharaoh himself and for his subjects. The pharaoh who neglected the building of pyramids, or the other required buildings, courted doom for himself as well as for all those who relied on him for their resurrection.²¹⁹

Darius also learned that the first thing that a pharaoh decides is with regard to the complex in which he will be put to rest. Since the era of pyramids had long passed and the later tombs were not as impressive, Darius decided to follow Tuthmosis I and be buried in a cliff tomb.²²⁰ For this, he chose a valley that later came to be called *Naqsh-e Rostam*. This valley, distant from Pasargadae, was to serve as the "valley of the kings" of Iran dedicated to the Achaemenid family.

Pyramids and cliff tombs, however, are not as important as some of the less visible, but required, structures in an ancient Egyptian mortuary complex. The pyramid and the cliff tomb reassured all those who worried about the safety of the pharaoh as he traveled in the underworld. It assured that no physical harm would come to the pharaoh's body or his wealth before he presented himself to *Osiris* and the other gods. What is of paramount importance to understand is that it was not so much the safety of the pharaoh that was on the mind of the Egyptian commoner who toiled on a pyramid or a cliff tomb, but the surety of his own resurrection, which was tied to the resurrection of the pharaoh. To the Egyptian mind, therefore, the pyramid or the cliff tomb was a requirement in the same way that it was a requirement for the pharaoh to be buried in one. Darius's cliff tomb, therefore, was part of a message that he sent to his Egyptian subjects that their resurrection was safe with him.

The next building that was required in a mortuary complex was a mortuary temple. This could be a very large complex or a small, two-story building. In any event, the part of the building that was used as the mortuary was always a very mysterious building, an enigma to the outsider. No one but those involved in the burial ceremony were allowed to enter that part of the complex. Its walls were usually solid, and burning torches lit the interior. The significance of the mortuary temple rested in the fact that in it the body of the pharaoh was mummified for its long journey in the underworld. In the afterlife, at the Court of *Osiris*, the heart of the pharaoh was weighed against the feather of the goddess *ma'at*. If the pharaoh had been just, he would keep his heart; otherwise, a monster would devour it.

A pharaoh whose heart was not weighed against the feather of *ma'at*—that would typically be a non-Egyptian pharaoh who had ignored building a mortuary temple and thus had not undergone the trial—was not able to travel in the

underworld unharmed; rather, he faced great difficulties and perished. The subjects of such a pharaoh, too, perished both physically and spiritually. They died physically because the Nile would not bless them with water, and they died spiritually because the subjects of a pharaoh who did not measure up to the standards of *ma'at* were not blessed with Osiris's assistance to resurrect. In short, even though they did not know exactly what went on in the mortuary temple, the existence of one was enough assurance to the ordinary Egyptian that the pharaoh was on the right path to Osiris and that Osiris favored them.

Interesting enough, a building that fits the description of a mortuary temple exists in *Naqsh-i Rostam*. It is known as *Kaba'a Zardusht*. Scholars continue to debate its function.

The third and last of the three structures that had lasting significance in the life and death struggle of the ancient Egyptians was the rejuvenation or *heb-sed* court. This was where the pharaoh trained his body and mind. The depictions on the walls of the *heb-sed* court showed the pharaoh jogging or throwing a javelin. He or she performed all that was necessary to keep a healthy body and a sharp mind. The *heb-sed* court was also where, every thirty years, the pharaoh demonstrated to the satisfaction of the temple priests that he was physically and mentally capable of maintaining *ma'at* and gaining resurrection for himself and his subjects. Since this was probably the most important part of the complex, its building began early in the pharaoh's rule and its walls reflected the gradual progress of the pharaoh towards resurrection. The presence of his sandal bearer at his side at all events showed that no other officials were present to help the pharaoh in carrying out the required exercises.

Darius I ruled for thirty-six years. As a rule, he should have had at least one *heb-sed* festival. Could Persepolis, with the depictions of the King on its walls, showing his prowess, among other things, have served as his *heb-sed* court?²²¹

As is evident from the discussion above, *ma'at* was a "contract" between the ruler and the ruled, a contract in which the two ends of the continuum of power met and engaged in specific activities that would achieve a common goal. The role of the pharaoh was to usher in divine inspiration, implement divine rules, and create a just society, a society that would be worthy of being resurrected. The role of the subjects was to carry out whatever tasks were necessary to enable the pharaoh to resurrect.

Could it be that *Naqsh-i Rostam*, *Ka'ba-i Zardusht*, and Persepolis were originally set forth as a mortuary complex for Pharaoh Darius whereby he showcased his maintenance of *ma'at* to his subjects in far-off Egypt?²²² Was he assuring them that he was concerned about their resurrection? Similarly there appears a sign that looks like a "cross" or "plus" in front of the tombs of the Achaemenid kings. Could this design be interpreted as the depiction of the goddess *ma'at* as she sits in front of Egyptian tombs, such as is in front of the tomb of Queen Nefertari?²²³ These, however, are questions that need further investigation.

The important thing to reiterate is that the bond that was created between

Pharaoh Darius and his Egyptian subjects did not last long. Darius's successors abandoned the Egyptians to themselves and, consequently, were not held dear by the Egyptians. The Egyptians did not see any reason to enter their names in a *cartouche* or build impressive structures for them.²²⁴ In fact, such feats were not repeated in Iran until the advent of the Safavid kings, at least not at that level of splendor.

Darius I the Great was a humane, wise, and judicious administrator. He excelled in law and architecture. After the chaos that followed the death of Cambyses II and after the eight-month rulership of Gaumata, the Persian Empire was coming apart. Darius consolidated it and expanded its might. Because he respected the languages, religions, and cultures of his subject nations, Persians and non-Persians alike fought his battles, built lavish palaces for him, and brought him precious gifts.²²⁵

Xerxes I

(r. 486–465 BCE)

Xerxes I (henceforth Xerxes) was born c. 519 BCE and ruled for twenty-one years. He died in 465 BCE at Persepolis at the age of 54. In his mid-twenties, Xerxes was assigned the governorship of Babylonia and was in that position for 8 years. His governorship of Babylonia distinguished him among the other claimants to the throne, including Artabazanes.²²⁶

In a portrait in which Darius accepts a messenger, Xerxes appears as the heir apparent. He stands behind his father's throne. Father and son occupy the pinnacle of a symbolic pyramid. The nobles, priests, generals, and dignitaries are below them. A long procession of subject peoples appears before the king and offers tribute. The participation of Xerxes in this assembly signifies Darius's attempt at creating a mutual bond between the prince and the representatives of the many nations bringing gifts to his court at Persepolis.

After Darius's death, his thirty-three year old son, Xerxes, the eldest among the four children born to Atossa, became king. He excelled in military campaign and architecture. He mobilized the largest army ever assembled in ancient times and marched against Greece. He crossed Thessaly and annexed Attica to the Persian Empire. Posterity remembers Xerxes for capturing Athens, burning the Athenian Acropolis, and building the Hall of 100 Columns of Xerxes at Persepolis.

As was the case with his father, Xerxes had to contend with a number of rebel *satraps*. His own brother, Aryamen, the *satrap* of Bactria, rose up but was brought back within the fold. In 484 BCE, he put down a rebellion in Egypt and treated the Egyptians quite harshly. He destroyed the Egyptian fortifications in the north and appointed his brother, Achaemenes, as *satrap*. He was so upset with the Egyptians that he refused the title of pharaoh offered to him by the high priest. In 482/481 BCE, he put down a rebellion in Babylonia and punished the Babylonians severely by removing the golden statue of *Marduk*,²²⁷ the god revered by the Babylonians. *Marduk* was the god that held Cyrus II by the hand and introduced him to his subjects. In order to remove any thought of independence in the minds of his *satraps*, especially the *satraps* of Egypt and Babylonia, Xerxes removed the mention of *satrapies* from his new title of "Lord of Nations," instead of "King of Babylonians, Persians, and Medes." Some sources report the new title as "King of the Medes and the Persians."

Like his father, after returning tranquility to the land, Xerxes took measures to strengthen the Persian army. He intended to march on Greece and subdue the Greek city-states once and for all. At his court, there were pros and cons regarding the invasion. Exiled Greeks and figures holding prominent positions in Persia, Lydia, and Athens promoted war. Mardonius, too, was on the side of war.²²⁸ The king's uncle, Artabanus, on the other hand, made a long speech enumerating the reasons for not engaging the warlike Greeks for mere revenge. He reminded Xerxes of the enormous loss of life that had resulted from Darius's campaigns in Europe.²²⁹ He advised Xerxes to continue with his plans to unify the empire. The final decision, however, was for Xerxes to make. He criticized Artabanus for cowardice and ordered him to remain at court during the war. He then spoke: either Persia rules over Greece or Greece will rule over Persia.

The next four years were spent on military preparations, diplomatic²³⁰ negotiations before the invasion, and marshalling of forces. He dispatched envoys to certain Greek cities and demanded "earth and water," i.e., recognition of Persian suzerainty without recourse to war. Some cities accepted.

Xerxes I's Invasion of Greece

Xerxes I's invasion of Greece differed from his father's invasions in that by this time the Greek city-states were expecting a massive invasion by the Persians. As a result, during the same years that Xerxes was preparing to invade Greece, the Greeks were fortifying their defenses. The two major undertakings by Xerxes for the invasion were the creation of a bridge of boats over the Hellespont for his army to cross into Europe and a major canal at Mount Athos so that his fleet could move beyond the

mountain without the type of disaster that had destroyed Mardonius's expedition.²³¹ A geological team investigating the canal reports that the canal was 1.25 miles long, 80–100 feet wide at the bottom, and in the middle it rose to a height of about 50 feet above sea level.

On the Greek side, after messengers brought news that the force that accompanied Xerxes was enormous, the 31 Greek city-states that had voted to fight the Persians instead of offering earth and water gathered in an assembly at the Isthmus of Corinth and made several decisions. One question was how to fund a war of that spectacular dimension. Another question was which city-state should lead the land and naval forces against the Persians.

During the time that Xerxes was marshalling troops and dispatching his emissaries to the Greek city-states to ask for "earth and water," a large mine of silver was found in the southeastern part of Attica, at Mt. Laurion (484 BCE).²³² As a result, Greeks had a huge surplus of funds that they could divide among themselves or use for civic purposes. Could this windfall be a response to the first question that the Greeks were trying to solve? As for the command of the forces, both the land and sea commands were given to the Spartans.

At this stage, the Greeks needed a first-rate strategy to face the force that accompanied Xerxes, a strategy that would enable a small force to prevail against the type of army that the spies had reported.²³³ In search of a strategy, they consulted the Oracle at Delphi twice. The second time, the Oracle said something to the effect that, "Only the wooden wall will save Athens."²³⁴ Themistocles, who was an Athenian politician, Archon (493/92 BCE), and veteran of the Battle of Marathon, argued that the wooden wall was nothing but the wooden hulls of ships. He, therefore, suggested that they should spend the funds from the silver on ships that would defend the city-states against incursions by Aegina. Since the Oracle seemed to support Themistocles, the funds were spent on building 200 triremes. At the time that Xerxes was moving from Thermopylae to Athens, the triremes were being assembled in the Straights of Salamis for a final battle against the Persians.

In the spring of 490 BCE, an army the likes of which, according to Herodotus, no one had seen or remembered gathered at Sardis and was led by the king himself. It took seven days for his army of between 360,000 and two million to cross the Hellespont on a bridge made up of barge boats.²³⁵ At one point, when the sea was stormy, Xerxes ordered the sea to be whipped three hundred lashes to calm it down. The bridge was not disassembled so that, in the event of a Persian defeat, the king could return to Asia and not be stranded in Europe.

Xerxes then circled the Aegean Sea, crossed Macedonia and Thessaly, and headed for Attica. He was accompanied by his fleet, always located at a short distance offshore. The Greek states, led by Sparta, chose the narrow pass at Thermopylae for the initial meeting with Xerxes. The Greek navy, at nearby Artemisium, was in constant contact with the land force.

Thermopylae was a narrow path about the width of two carts. On one side of the path there was a mountain and on the other side a sheer drop to the sea.

Artemisium was a cape north of Euboea. The League deployed 271 ships to prevent the Persian fleet from assisting Xerxes's land forces.²³⁶

The number of land troops fielded was quite uneven. On the Persian side, Xerxes had assembled an army that, according to Herodotus, drank rivers dry. The actual number is in dispute. On the Greek side, there were 300 Spartans, 900 helots (second-class citizens in Sparta), 400 Thebans, and 700 Thespians. Of these the 400 Thebans deserted and joined the Persians, leaving 1,900 defenders.²³⁷

Initially, the battle went badly for the Persians but, in the end, they were victorious. Leonidas and his three hundred men fought bravely and died to the last man, allowing their compatriots time to withdraw to the narrow strait of Salamis. Athens was left defenseless. After the Greek army lost the battle, the naval force at Artemisium abandoned its position and returned to Athens.

Xerxes, having lost four of the sons of Darius at Thermopylae, became the only Persian monarch ever to march triumphantly into Athens. Most of the inhabitants had already been evacuated to the Island of Salamis. Those who remained took refuge in the Athenian Acropolis, the home of the patron goddess of the city, Athena. Xerxes burned the Athenian temples, as he had vowed to do in revenge for the burning of Sardis during the Ionian revolt, and celebrated his conquest.²³⁸ He then decided to return to Iran. But, very soon, it became clear to him that while the battle was won, the war raged on. So, quite unwillingly, he was dragged into a naval confrontation at Salamis.²³⁹

During the Battle of Salamis, Themistocles drew the Persian fleet into the narrow straights north of the Salamis Island, where the stout Persian ships could not maneuver easily. He then rammed the ships with the powerful Greek triremes. Watching from a distance, Xerxes realized that the confrontation with Themistocles, the naval commander who had contributed to the defeat of his father at Marathon, was not winnable.²⁴⁰

Xerxes's fleet did not do well altogether in the war. To begin with, before reaching Artemisium, it lost a number of its ships to a gale that blew from the direction of the Hellespont. At Artemisium, it lost more ships to the Greeks before the Greeks received a signal that the Greek land army had been defeated, after which the Greek fleet headed for home. Finally, at Attica, Xerxes himself fell victim to a ruse. Themistocles, who had indicated that he would not fight in the Salamis Straits in order to save the Peloponnesians, stayed in the straights and fought. The Persian fleet, a disunited force made up of ships contributed by different nations such as Phoenicia and Egypt, lacked coordination. Their command at the beginning of the battle was to chase the fleeing Greeks as they moved towards the end of the straits. It soon became apparent, however, that the Greeks were not fleeing at all. Rather, they stood their ground and, with the Peloponnesian side of the coast protecting their backs, rammed the Persian ships with triremes that had been built particularly for the purpose. The Persian navy, to the dismay of Xerxes, who viewed the fight from the Attica side, was routed.²⁴¹

Fearful that he might become stranded in Europe, Xerxes withdrew to Thessaly and from there to Asia.²⁴² He left Mardonius, Persia's most capable commander,

in charge.²⁴³

The last major battle between the Greeks and the Persians, the Battle of Plataea, ended with the defeat and death of Mardonius. Advisor and brother-in-law of Darius I, Mardonius was instrumental in persuading Darius I to punish the Greeks for their role in the Ionian revolt. He led the first expedition to Greece, but his fleet was destroyed by a storm at Mount Athos. When Xerxes I took over from his father, Mardonius, against Artabanus's recommendation, advised the king to complete his father's unfinished war. After the defeat at Salamis, and the departure of Xerxes, Mardonius undertook the task of holding to the gains and settling the war with the city-states. He offered the city-states some hopeful alternatives for peace, but when they refused, he prepared for war.²⁴⁴

The battle that ensued quickly turned into a stalemate. The Persians were cooped up in a stockade that they had built near the town of Plataea. By eleven days into the war, there was still no indication of combat. Recently, the Greeks had used a ruse, lured the Persian fleet into the narrow strait of Salamis and routed it. Now, they used a variety of the same. They pretended to have reached the limit of their patience and that they were leaving the battlefield.

Seeing the army of the enemy in disarray, Mardonius gave chase. He was using the same tactic that Cyrus the Great had used against the fleeing army of Croesus. Like Cyrus, he and the Immortals that he had requested to remain entered the battlefield. Unlike Croesus's army, the Athenians and Spartans turned around and fought back.²⁴⁵ In the process, Mardonius was killed. The Persian army, abandoned by its king and now without a leader, was forced back into the stockade and massacred.

Persians

The ancient poet and dramatist Aeschylus (c. 525–455 BCE) participated in both the Battle of Marathon and the Battle of Salamis. In his *Persians*, written eight years after Salamis, he brings the war to life. At the Achaemenid court, the Persian elders awaiting the news from Greece resurrect the ghost of Darius. Darius is appalled that Xerxes should have built a bridge of boats, and that he should have whipped the sea for disobedience. Eventually, a messenger brings the bad news: A demon came out of the dark of night and gave Xerxes a message, a devious message. In the morning, the enemy ships were arranged where they were not expected. Persian ships, falling victim to Greek triremes, were cut into pieces.¹ Queen Atossa, wondering who these Greeks are, asks the elders:

Atossa: Where is this island?

Elders: It is in the west where the sun sinks its rays.

Atossa: Why should my son yearn to capture such a distant land?

Elders: Capturing Greece makes him the master of the world.

Atossa: Do these Greeks have a large number of fighters?

Elders: They do. They defeated Persia at the Battle of Marathon.

Atossa: Are these Greeks rich?

Elders: Yes, they have a spring of silver on which they draw.

Atossa: Do they have good archers?

Elders: No. They fight with stout shields. They fight hand-in-hand with spears.

Atossa: What master do they obey?

Elders: They are servants to no man.²

1 For the full text, the longest in the book, see Aeschylus, 1981, pp. 57–60.

2 For the full text, see Aeschylus, 1981, pp. 50–51.

As for the Persian fleet, it headed for the island of Samos on the Asian coast for safety. At Mycale, north of Miletus, it met some Greek ships. In the battle that ensued, the Persians were defeated. The burning hulks of the Persian fleet in the harbor served as a signal to the Ionians that their independence was certain and that Persia's aspiration to rule Greece, and indeed the world of that time, had come to a disastrous end.

At Persepolis, Xerxes completed Darius's Apadana and built a palace of his own. It is a magnificent complex erected southeast of Darius's palace. He also became involved in domestic politics and in the affairs of the court. A partial history of these involvements, especially in relation to the Jews of Persia, is found in *The Book of Esther*. Xerxes also became preoccupied in harem intrigue. This latter involvement resulted in his death. Xerxes was murdered by his courtiers, among them Artabanus, his minister, in 465 BCE.

The Delian League

At the conclusion of the Greco-Persian Wars, especially after the Battles of Plataea and Mycale, the city-states that had contributed to the war effort formed the Delian League with Athens as its leader (477 BCE). The initial mandate of the League was to ward off any incursions or invasions from Persia. Also, in cooperation with city-states liberated after Persia's defeat, it led campaigns of retribution against Persia's territories in the Aegean Sea. The center of the activities of the League, including its treasury and congresses, was stationed in the Island of Delos, hence the name Delian League. In 454 BCE, Pericles moved the League to Athens and, in spite of the League's initial mandate, used its resources, especially its navy, to promote Athenian imperial interests. The unhappiness of the League members went beyond confrontation with Athens and, eventually, brought about the Peloponnesian War. The League was dissolved in 404 BCE.

On the way to achieving his goal of capturing Athens,²⁴⁶ Xerxes made a few mistakes for which he, and the Iranians, paid dearly. After the death of Darius, the *satrapies*, especially Egypt and Babylonia, were unhappy and in revolt. Xerxes ignored their unhappiness at a time that he needed their goodwill and assistance. Additionally, blinded by vengeance, he ignored the good counsel of his uncle and took on Greece in Europe, ignoring the fact that the Greek navy had just completed the building of 200 triremes. Most important, on the strength of the words of a spy sent by Themistocles, he allowed his fleet of stout vessels to be caught in uncharted waters where they did not have room to maneuver.

Artaxerxes I Longmanus (longhanded)

(r. 465–425 BCE)

In 465–64 BCE, in the course of a court revolution the details of which are not clear, Xerxes I was murdered at the hands of his own court officials. In the same year, a very young Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes I and Amestris, aided by general Megabyzus, ascended the throne and ruled for 40 years. As king, he punished the murderers of his father. Regarding the attribution of Longhanded to Artaxerxes, opinions vary. Some interpret it literally saying that his right arm was longer than his left. Others, interpreting it symbolically, distinguish him as a capable king who exerted far-reaching power.

Like Darius I, Artaxerxes I's rule began with rebellions. He brought the rebellious *satrapies* into the fold. In 460 BCE, Inarus, son of Psammetichus, aided by Athenian troops, revolted in Egypt.²⁴⁷ Artaxerxes I sent Achaemenes, his uncle, to suppress the revolt. Achaemenes was killed and the uprising continued. Artaxerxes I then sent Megabyzus, the *satrap* of Syria, to suppress the revolt. Megabyzus was successful. The revolt was quelled in 454 BCE.

Once the hostilities ceased, on behalf of Artaxerxes I, Megabyzus promised Inarus safe conduct to Persia and pledged that he and his fifty Greek companions would not be harmed. In Persia, Artaxerxes I welcomed the group, but Achaemenes's mother did not. She wanted the king to execute all of them as revenge for the death of her son. In time, she succeeded in moving her plan for the destruction of the Greeks ahead. Five years later, Artaxerxes I impaled Inarus and beheaded the fifty Greeks.

The Peace of Callias

In 450 BCE, Athens captured Cyprus but, in the process, lost its leader, Cimon. To settle the dispute, at the request of the Persians, General Callias took a delegation to Susa and sued for peace. In the winter of 449–48 BCE, the peace of Callias, on the basis of *status quo ante*, was signed. Athens gave up Egypt, Cyprus, and the Ionian cities on the Aegean coast. Persia promised not to advance an army beyond the Halys River and accepted some naval restrictions.

After the Peace of Callias, major hostilities between Athens and Persia ceased.¹ Persia, under Artaxerxes I, used its gold resources in support of Sparta to weaken the power of Athens and, when necessary, in support of Athens to keep Sparta in line. The Peace of Callias marks the beginning of the decline of the Achaemenid Empire. It also marks the beginning of Pericles's use of the wealth of the Delian League to create the Golden Age of Athens. The achievements of Athens in the arts, architecture, sciences, drama, political thought, history, and philosophy that began at this time remained unsurpassed for a long time.

After ruling for 40 or 42 years, Artaxerxes I died in 424 BCE. He is buried at *Naqsh-e Rostam* in Fars province.

¹ For more detail on the Peace of Callias, see Olmstead, 1948, pp. 310–11.

Megabyzus was the son of the *satrap* of Babylonia. His father was killed when his *satrapy* rebelled. Megabyzus participated in suppressing the revolt and

eventually became the *satrap* of Syria. It was as *satrap* of Syria that he led the Persian armies that defeated Inarus and his Greek allies in Egypt. Because Artaxerxes I did not honor Megabyzus's word and killed Inarus and his companions, Megabyzus rebelled against his king. Artaxerxes sent two contingents against Megabyzus; both contingents were defeated. Megabyzus was eventually pardoned by the king and reinstalled as *satrap* of Syria. He died at the age of 76.

One of the events that could have occurred during the early years of the reign of Artaxerxes I is the arrival of Themistocles at the Persian court.²⁴⁸ That is when the Athenians ostracized Themistocles and the old warrior had to leave his homeland (471 BCE). It is reported that Artaxerxes I not only gave refuge to his father's enemy, but also appointed him governor of Persia's *satrapy* in Asia Minor.²⁴⁹

Under Artaxerxes I the situation of the Jews in Israel improved considerably. The king appointed the orthodox scribe Ezra to be in charge of Jewish affairs. About 1,500 Jewish families returned to Jerusalem.²⁵⁰ The restoration of the Temple, previously ordered by Cyrus the Great, so progressed in the reign of Artaxerxes I that it was completed in year six of the reign of Darius II.²⁵¹

Artaxerxes I's building activities included the completion of the throne hall (the "Hall of 100 Columns") in Persepolis. He might be the king who is depicted at Persepolis on the northern doorway of the throne hall. He sits on a throne that is borne by representatives of the nations of the empire. It has been suggested that under Artaxerxes I, in about 441 BCE, a new and distinctly Zoroastrian calendar, copying the Egyptian calendar, was promulgated in the empire.²⁵²

Artaxerxes I was a capable, resolute, and skillful monarch (especially in foreign affairs). He showed statesmanship and seemed qualified to renew Persia's world power status. In internal affairs, however, he was a weakling, mostly commanded by the harem.²⁵³

Darius II Nothus (bastard)

(r. 423–404 BCE)

Son of Artaxerxes I, Darius II is also referred to as Nothus (bastard) because his mother was not of royal birth. He was the eighth Achaemenid King of Kings and ruled for 19 years. He served as the *satrap* of Hyrcania for some time before he became king. He ascended the throne after the short reigns of two of his half-brothers, Xerxes II (425–24 BCE) and Sogdianus (424 BCE). During the reign of Darius II, there were three revolts: An unsuccessful revolt in Egypt in 410 BCE was followed by a successful revolt in 404 BCE by Amariteh, who established the 28th Dynasty in Egypt; there was also a revolt in Media about which no details are available other than that the Medians were brought within the fold.

The Peloponnesian Wars

The Peloponnesian Wars began in 431 BCE as a result of Sparta's concern over the quick rise of Athens to power. The Peloponnesian League, therefore, attacked Attica. To strengthen their side, the Spartans promised Darius II that if they won they would return Persia's lost cities on the Asiatic side (412 BCE).

In return, the Persians promised to support the Spartans financially.

Cyrus the Younger, who served as a *satrap* in western Asia Minor, played a major role in Sparta's victory over Athens. He provided the Spartans with much needed funds (404 BCE).

Darius II died in 404 BCE in Babylon. He was survived by his two sons: Cyrus the Younger and Artaxerxes II. One of the four tombs at *Naqsh-e Rostam* is ascribed to Darius II. He was the last Achaemenid to be buried there.

Iranian evidence for the rule of Darius II is scarce; all his inscriptions refer to building activities at Susa. One reads, "This palace, of stone in its column(s), Darius the great king built, Darius [II] the King may Ahuramazda together with the gods protect."

Artaxerxes II Memon (mindful)

(r. 404–358 BCE)

Artaxerxes II was the oldest son of Darius II. He ruled for 46 years. His reign was the longest among the Achaemenids. He may have lived between 86 and 94 years. When Darius II died in 404 BCE, Artaxerxes was appointed king in accordance with his father's wishes. His younger brother, Cyrus, *satrap* of one of the western provinces of Asia Minor, took exception. Cyrus participated in a conspiracy against his brother, with a plot to assassinate him at his coronation. But the plot went wrong. Even though Cyrus had intended to kill him, because of the intervention of their mother, Artaxerxes II forgave Cyrus and sent him back to his *satrapy*.

In 401 BCE, Cyrus openly rebelled against Artaxerxes II and, with a force that included 13,000 Greek mercenaries, moved on Babylon. At the crucial battle of Cunaxa in Mesopotamia, Cyrus fell at the hand of a Carian soldier. An authentic account of these events is given in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, which details the subsequent retreat of some 10,000 Greek soldiers and their safe arrival in Greece.²⁵⁴ The fact that 10,000 Greek soldiers, whose leaders had been slain, could escape to safety from the center of the kingdom of the King of Kings clearly points to the empire's lack of military capability and lack of strength.²⁵⁵

Artaxerxes III Ochus

(r. 359–340 BCE)

Son of Artaxerxes II, Artaxerxes III was the 11th king in the Achaemenid line of monarchs and the first pharaoh of the 31st dynasty of Egypt. His reign coincided with the inauguration of the reign of Philip II of Macedonia. His major objectives were to consolidate royal authority and to terminate the revolts that threatened to break up the empire. As a first step, he ordered the extermination of all the Achaemenid princes. Even those with a remote right to the throne were not spared.²⁵⁶ Then he moved quickly and suppressed the many revolts that were led by various *satraps*. With the *satraps'* revolt at an end, Persian rule over Asia Minor and Phoenicia was again consolidated. In these wars, Codomannus, later, Darius III, distinguished himself.

Before Artaxerxes III became king, Egypt had enjoyed 65 years of independence. About 346 BCE, Artaxerxes III resolved to bring Egypt back into the fold. He marched on Egypt, recaptured the citadels of Pelusium and Bubastis in the Nile delta, and put an end to Egyptian independence (ca. 343 BCE). The Egyptian pharaoh, Nectanebus, fled to Nubia to maintain an independent kingdom there. The Persians plundered the towns and reportedly carried off many Egyptians to Persia. Artaxerxes III destroyed temples, confiscated the Egyptian calendars, and forced the temple priests to buy them back from him at exorbitant prices. He killed the *Apis* Bull and ordered a donkey to be installed in its place.

The Egyptians hated Artaxerxes III vehemently and identified him with the donkey to which he had sacrificed the *Apis* Bull. Bagoas, a proud Egyptian, had the same feeling. He disdained Artaxerxes III's treatment of his people and of Egypt's sacred traditions, especially the *Apis* Bull.

Although there were occasional clashes with the Greeks and Macedonians, Artaxerxes III's relations with the Greek world were cordial. The two worlds, however, did not cooperate with each other. For instance, when in 351 BCE, Artaxerxes III invited Athens and Sparta to join him in a campaign against Egypt, they both declined, but they assured the king of their friendship. When Philip of Macedon attacked the town of Perinthos (present-day Eski Shehir), which, at the time, dominated the Sea of Marmara, Greek and Persian relations became strained.

Interpreting Philip's real intention as a threat, Artaxerxes III sent troops into Thrace and repulsed the invader. This defeat began a Macedonian hostility against the Persians and led to Philip II's proclamation of a Pan-Hellenic war against Persia (340 BCE).

Through his own efforts and with the aid of his Greek generals, even though for a fleeting moment, Artaxerxes III revived the old empire of Darius I. He restored order to the state, reorganized the governmental apparatus, and strengthened the central power. His efforts were put to naught when in 338 BCE, an Egyptian-born kingmaker, a eunuch called Bagoas, poisoned him and murdered the rest of the royal family. This loss spelled out disaster for the future of the Persian Empire.

Artaxerxes III was an energetic, crafty, strong-minded, and restless monarch. But at the same time that he was cruel and violent, he was fair. He was also a builder. An inscription on the southwest side of the terrace at Persepolis attests to his involvement in finalizing the building activities at the complex.

Mithraism

Mithra is the god of the sun, victory, and contracts. Mithraism is centered on Mithra's slaying a bull in a cave in primordial times. Helios and Mithra had partaken of a meal consisting of the flesh of the bull. In memory of that, cult members, wearing animal heads and gathering in Mithraea, partake of consecrated bread mingled with intoxicating *Haoma* juice. Within the cult, the initiates are divided into seven ascending grades, equal to the seven planets:

Raven Mercury

Bride Venus

Soldier Mars
Lion Jupiter
Persian the Moon
Courier of the Sun the Sun
Father Saturn

Through these grades, they believed, symbolically, the soul of the initiate ascended to the heavens. Only the Lion, and degrees above, partook of the meal.¹

1 For creed in Mithraism, as well as Mithraic ethics, eschatology, and relationship to state and Christianity, see Dhalla, pp. 302–308.

Artaxerxes III at Persepolis: “I am the son (of) Artaxerxes the King, (of) Artaxerxes who was the son (of) Darius the King, (of) Darius (who was) the son (of) Artaxerxes the King, (of) Artaxerxes (who was) the son (of) Xerxes the King, (of) Xerxes (who was) the son (of) Darius the King, (of) Darius (who was) the son of Hystaspes by name, of Hystaspes (who was) the son (of) Arsames by name, an Achaemenid. Saith Artaxerxes the King, ‘This stone staircase was built by me in my time.’ Saith Artaxerxes the King. ‘Me may Ahuramazda and the god Mithra protect, and this country, and what was built by me.’”

Darius III

(r. 336–330 BCE)

Bagoas killed Artaxerxes III and his sons, except Arses. Arses ruled for a short time only to be killed by Bagoas, who then installed a forty-six-year-old man called Codomannus, a grandnephew of Artaxerxes II, on the throne. He came to be known as Darius III. Codomannus’s major accomplishment had been quelling a rebellion in Kadusia, for which he had been given the *satrapy* of Armenia. The death of Artaxerxes III coincided with the 7th year of Codomannus’s appointment as the *satrap* of Armenia.

Darius III ruled for six years. Although incompetent, he was cunning enough to recognize that Bagoas had poisoned his predecessor and that he had a similar plan for him. Darius III, therefore, forced Bagoas to drink the poisonous cup that he had brought for the king.

The death of Bagoas was the prelude to difficulties for Darius III, especially from the *satrapy* of Egypt. Unlike his namesake Darius I, Darius III was not prepared to rule a vast empire. He went to Egypt, quelled the rebellion, and fortified the kingdom, hoping that the Egyptians might defeat Alexander and save Persia. In general, however, he possessed neither the experience nor the charisma required to consolidate his power either in Persia or in Egypt. Alexander defeated both Egypt and Persia and became the “Lord of Asia.”

Neither were rebellious *satraps* his only problem. Philip II of Macedon, authorized by the League of Corinth, was seeking vengeance for the atrocities of Xerxes I against Athens and Athenians. Before long, Philip’s generals moved into ancient Lydia and freed the eastern regions of Anatolia. After Philip II was assassinated, his son, Alexander, continued his father’s plans. Darius III found

Alexander to be one of the most uncompromising individuals when it came to division of power. Alexander defeated Darius III at Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela (331 BCE). Darius III fled before Macedonia's advancing army to Central Asia where Bessus, one of his own *satraps*, murdered him. With the death of Darius III, the Achaemenid Empire came to an end (330 BCE).

Alexander became not only the King of Kings of Persia, but also the King of Macedon and the Supreme Commander of Greek Forces. Of note, of course, is Alexander's vision of a fusion of the two peoples, the Greeks and the Persians.

Achaemenid Gods

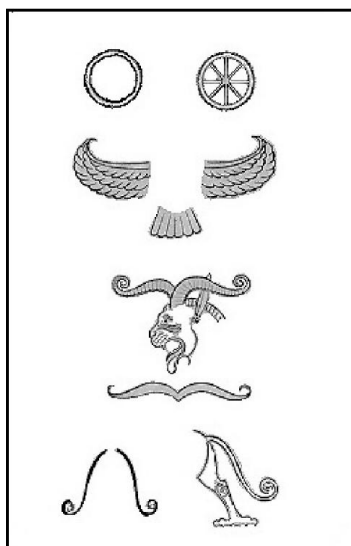
The early Achaemenids, until the rule of Artaxerxes I, practiced a form of the faith that was closer to Mazdaism than to the Zoroastrian practices of the Sassanids. Zoroastrianism was, at the time of the early Achaemenids, an eastern Iranian faith. Its practitioners might have had little contact with the early Achaemenids. During the rule of Artaxerxes I and thereafter, Zoroastrianism was recognized as the official faith.²⁵⁷ It flourished in western Iranian lands and, eventually, became a bulwark against Hellenism, protecting the empires of the last Parthian and, eventually, Sassanid monarchs.²⁵⁸ The Achaemenids, guided by a triad of gods, believed that their king had a mandate (*farr*) from *Ahura Mazda* to expand their good kingdom.²⁵⁹

Rather than believing in one god—*Ahura Mazda*—the Achaemenids believed in three gods: *Ahura Mazda*, *Mithra*, and *Anahita*. Soudavar identifies *Ahura Mazda* as the source of the emanation of the *farr*. *Mithra* propagates *farr* during the day and *Apam-Napat* (same as *Anahita* in this case) protects the *farr* during the night.²⁶⁰ It is true that although earlier monarchs, especially Darius I, emphasized the role of *Ahura Mazda*, they always mentioned one or the other of the two gods, or even the "Royal High Magi."²⁶¹ During the reigns of Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III, all three deities were worshiped.²⁶²

An analysis of the motifs used by the Achaemenid artists, who decorated the palaces and apadanas of Persepolis, shows the involvement of the three cosmic forces that materialize in historic times as depictions of deities: *Ahura Mazda*, *Mithra*, and *Anahita*. These motifs are summarized in the chart below.

Anahita	Mithra	Ahura Mazda	Aspect
moon	sun	the planet Jupiter	astrological
water, snow, rain, hail, dew	light	wind, air	elemental
rivers and seas	the earth	the sky	locational
bull, ram, animals w. horn	lion, horse	birds, esp. eagles	animal
call, slim, beautiful lady resembling a queen; wears a diadem	youth resembling a crown prince, bow, 3 arrows	perfect man with a long, trimmed beard, looks like ancient kings	human
lotus blossom	palm tree, lotus blossom, sunflower	cypress tree, lotus flower	plant
white	red, yellow, orange, gold, purple	azure, turquoise blue, sky (light) blue, green	color
pearl	ruby	turquoise, lapis lazuli, emerald	jewels
wet	dry	moderate	temper
female	male	neuter	gender
winter	summer	—	season

In the chart, each god has a number of aspects that range from the astrological, elemental, locational, animal, human, plant, and gender to each deity's desired colors, jewels, temper, and seasons. From among those symbols, the astrological and the animal symbols are chosen to show the Achaemenids' devotion to *Ahura Mazda*, *Mithra*, and *Anahita*. The essential animal parts that combine in symbolic terms to confirm the interconnection of the three gods are summarized in the following plate.



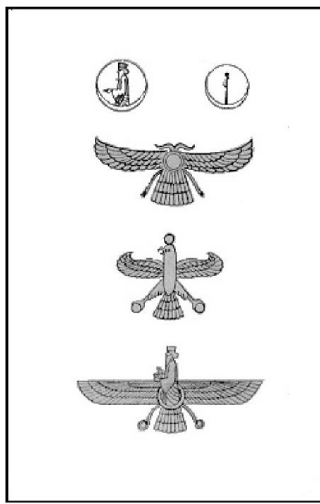
Assorted animal parts representing the gods of the Achaemenids

The depictions begin, at the top, with two circles. The one to the left is a symbolic representation of power. The one to the right, which resembles a wheel, represents the firmament. Often a likeness of *Ahura Mazda* appears within the circle. Below the circles, the wings and tail of an eagle are presented. The eagle, needless to say, is the symbol of the chief god *Ahura Mazda*. Below the tail of the eagle there are two sets of horns that belong either to a bull or an ewe. One set adorns the head of a lion while the other set is detached. There are also two representations of the tail of a lion. One is attached to a lion's hind leg that itself ends in an eagle's claw. The other is a stylized tail, curled up as lion tails usually appear. We know from the chart that horned animals are symbols of *Anahita* and that the lion symbolizes *Mithra*. The fact that the artists could combine the symbolic features—the horns of a bull on the head of a lion and the claws of an eagle replacing the paws of a lion—points to the fluidity of expression that was afforded the artists and the faithful alike.

This plate serves us in three ways. First, it introduces the motifs that symbolize the three Achaemenid deities. Second, the fact that only these three sets of symbols exist and the fact that they are repeated in various combinations indicates that there were no other gods worshiped. And third, we can use the components of this chart as a key for the explanation of the more enigmatic *Faruhar* figure used frequently as a symbol of the Zoroastrian religion.

In the bas-reliefs of the Achaemenid era, the *Faruhar* is depicted as a winged being that hovers over the person of the king. The symbols enumerated earlier are combined to represent different manifestations of the deity. The one that resembles a winged being just happens to be the one used more often and, of course, is the one that is controversial.²⁶³

Western scholars generally refer to the depiction of *Faruhar* simply as “the Great God *Ahura Mazda*.”²⁶⁴ Zoroastrians consider it a depiction of their only deity, *Ahura Mazda* (the Lord of Wisdom). Zoroastrian publishers, perhaps imitating the books published by the theological centers of other religions, use this emblem as the invocation attributed to the deity of the faith. This practice, however, goes back only as far as the middle of the 19th century. The fact is that this type of symbolism was prevalent in the Near East and in Egypt from a long time before the Achaemenids.



Various representations of the Faruhar figure

The first two depictions above are stylized *Faruhars* composed of the astrological, rather than the animal symbols, representing the deities. Both are quite rare but expressive renditions. They consist of a likeness of *Ahura Mazda* (one more stylized than the other) within a full circle or sun disk (symbol of *Mithra*) and enhanced by the crescent moon (symbol of *Anahita*).

The next depiction, too, is rare. It includes the actual horns representing *Anahita* rather than horns depicted artistically by curling up the wings of the eagle, for instance. The wings and tail represent *Ahura Mazda* and the lion's tail represents *Mithra*.

The next depiction shows the three deities as three small circles held by an eagle. Here, the imaginary triangle formed by the three circles is the actual representation of the triad held together by the eagle (*Ahura Mazda*).

Finally, the most common *Faruhar* shows the chief god *Ahura Mazda* keeping the firmament (the circle he holds) in order. His presence is enhanced by the wings and tail of the eagle. *Mithra's* presence is represented by the symmetric lion tails that issue from the sides of the eagle. The body of *Ahura Mazda* covers the small horns that would otherwise be visible over the wings to indicate the presence of *Anahita*.

THE END OF THE ACHAEMENID DYNASTY

The Achaemenid Empire, which lasted for over two centuries, underwent the three usual phases of rise, decline, and fall. Its rise was meteoric, its decline illusory, due to the gradual decay that set in toward the end of the reign of Xerxes I, and its fall was tragic, as monarch after monarch failed to recapture the *farr* that had brought the dynasty its many victories and untold glory.²⁶⁵

What was the secret of the early Achaemenids that eluded their heirs? Except for Cambyses II, even though he conquered Egypt and northern Ethiopia, the early Achaemenid monarchs distinguished themselves as wise statesmen who employed excellent managerial and military techniques. They used their might for the common good, always seeking means that would elevate the empire's prosperity and the nation's well being. During the first eighty or so years of the empire, Iran was a real world power to contend with. It was a unified realm even though its people belonged to many nations who had been allowed to use their own local languages, worship their own gods, and promote their own lifestyles. Outwardly, they were Medes, Persians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians but, inwardly, they all were loyal subjects of the same King of Kings to whom they brought tribute and for whom they fought battles.²⁶⁶

The social structure of the Achaemenid Empire was a reflection of the Zoroastrian universal order. The smallest societal unit was the family, but not all families shared the same size and status. As we have seen, the king's family—including a harem, an untold number of attendants, eunuchs, and workers—was the most important. Six other families formed the next levels in the hierarchy. The families of the *satraps*, administrators, priests, and commanders formed the rest of the fabric of the upper echelon of the Achaemenid society.

Each family was part of a clan, a lineage, and a tribe. Whether the chief of a tribe was included among the ruling elite decided the potential for that tribe to receive land grants. If the tribe was included, where in the hierarchy it was placed would further define the roles that its members would play at the lineage, clan, and family levels. Future rights and opportunities available to each family were thus filtered through an invisible selective process. What made this complex scheme work without creating a great deal of unhappiness was the divine quality attached to Iranian rulership and societal structure. At the beginning, *Ahura Mazda* had selected the king (cf., *Gayomart*), and, as the omnipotent ruler, the king had assigned responsibility to the satraps, nobles, and the rest of society, down to the bondsmen. Divine appointments were beyond mortal questioning.

The king awarded rights and privileges in the form of land grants. Major contributors to the throne received large land holdings, which were then divided by the great families into smaller parcels and distributed among lower-level families for management. The process continued until there was no more land to be distributed. Those with land then hired the landless peasants to oversee the tilling and management of their parcels of land for a set share of the yield. Serfs and bondsmen, who were bought and sold with the land, however, did the actual tilling.

Finally, the advisors played a political as well as a social role in the governance and the administration of the empire. To begin with, there were only seven influential families in Iran at any given time. The king's family was one, albeit the most influential, of these families. The king rarely made decisions without consulting the heads of the other families and, usually, chose his wives from among their daughters. Emissaries to foreign courts, envoys to convey special messages to the *satrapies*, and arbiters in support of the king's interests were chosen from among

the members of these families.

The governmental structure of the early Achaemenids embraced all levels of society and provided incentive to produce. It was based on the Zoroastrian concept of universal rulership. The monarch, appointed by *Abura Mazda*, was the chief source of law, order, and guidance. He dispensed his authority throughout the empire by means of an assembly of notables. The membership of the assembly included the chief administrator, chief religious personages, military garrison commanders, advisors, and *satraps*, who rarely appeared at the court. Each member contributed in a unique way to aspects of the king's stewardship of the empire, and for this reason, all these positions and many others at the court and in the *satrapies* were filled with individuals of Persian blood whose loyalty to the throne was beyond question.

The *satraps* played a major role in the governance of the empire. They acted as minor kings in otherwise independent kingdoms. In some cases, they coined their own money, levied their own taxes, and appointed most of the *satrapy's* administrators. Only the surplus tax was sent to the treasury of the great king. In addition, the *satraps* had their own armies, which they fielded when necessary to support the king. During the rule of the early monarchs, when security was tight and transgressions were punished outright, the *satraps* rarely entertained the thought of rebellion or of unseating a reigning monarch. During the final decades of the dynasty, the *satraps* had the last word.

The administration of the Achaemenid Empire was sophisticated. It consisted of various offices, each of which dealt with specific aspects of the social, political, or economical needs of the realm. The most important office at the Achaemenid court was the office of the chief administrator. This office, in addition to the supervision of the governing apparatus of the state, oversaw the collection of taxes, as well as the allocation of the funds for state and royal projects. The chief administrator carried out his duties with the help of many lower-level bureaucrats in related bureaus. For instance, one bureau sent supervisors to the *satrapies* to oversee the division of the taxes. It was the responsibility of the chief administrator to make sure that the taxes levied were divided equitably among the *satraps* and the King of Kings. Another bureau took over the allocation process as soon as the taxes and the reports of the previously discussed bureau were filed at the court. Another major office in the administration was the office of the chief scribe. All communications, local, national, and international, were processed at this office. The office of the *chapar*, and the "eyes and ears" of the king worked in tandem with this office. The chief scribe, who was also the postmaster, was privy to much information that was not usually at the disposal of the other members of the assembly of notables.

The religious affairs and, to a great extent, the judiciary duties of the Achaemenid Dynasty were in the hands of the Magi, a priestly family of the Medes that had retained its status after the change of dynasty. Under Cyrus the Great, the Magi became very powerful. Gaumata, alleged to have usurped the throne while Cambyses II was in Egypt, was a Magi. As was his brother who, reportedly, had

encouraged him to capitalize on his resemblance to the slain Smerdis/Bardia and usurp the throne. Darius sought to curb the influence of the Magi in the administration, but apparently he did not succeed in establishing a direct link between the monarch and *Abura Mazda* without the assistance of the Magi. The Magi continued to remain strong and influential.

The Magi believed in the principles of good and evil, promoted next-of-kin marriages, and exposed their dead to the elements rather than burying them, as was the custom of their Achaemenid overlords. Being a closed society, the Magi had made their profession hereditary. The responsibilities of the Magi at the Achaemenid court included officiating sacrifices, interpreting dreams, and studying astrology. They also dabbled in medicine, guarded the tombs of the Achaemenid kings, and participated in coronation ceremonies. Some even became advisors to kings.

At the Achaemenid court, in theory, the king was the chief judge and lawgiver. Often, however, he relegated his judicial capacity to senior wise men of the court, freeing himself to attend to the more pressing national and international problems. In practice, the laws were legislated by the Magi who, in the early years of the empire, had the exclusive right to judicial duties. Punishment was commensurate with the nature of the crime, with lesser crimes resolved by administering a set number of lashes or fines of a certain amount of gold. Treason, adultery, murder, burning the dead, entering the king's quarters without permission, sitting on the king's throne in his absence, or insulting the members of the royal family were punishable by death.

The early Achaemenid state was fiscally sound. The Achaemenids coined the first Persian money, called *Darik*, introduced a uniform tax system, and standardized the weights and measures used throughout the empire. Discouraging slave labor in the construction of their palaces, the Achaemenids paid wages to men, women, and children who contributed to the construction of roads, bridges, and many magnificent buildings at Susa, Pasargadae, and Persepolis. The wages were in money and in kind. Additionally, even though native Persians were exempt from taxes, the taxes were moderate and fair for the rest of the population, based on the yield of the land and geared to the individual's ability to pay.

The Achaemenid fiscal economy had two sides: a consumer side and a producer side. While the governors and administrators formed the consumer side of the Achaemenid economy, producers were the field workers, serfs, prisoners of war, and other bondsmen who, for obvious reasons, had failed to garner pieces of land to till for themselves. The gap between the haves at the top of the pyramid and the have-not serfs and bondsmen at the base was filled by a third group of skilled workers, artisans, and traders. This diverse group, which often incorporated barbers, stonecutters, bakers, and builders, stimulated the economy by transforming agricultural and livestock products into food and consumer products, paving the way for setting up industrial enterprises.

The Achaemenid military was organized not by merit but by right of birth. As a result, key positions were often given to incapable commanders. This was the same

in the Persian navy as well, although rather than right of birth, the commanders had nationality rights. They were organized with respect to the prestige of their nation within the empire, not by merit. As a result, when faced with a merit-based system, they invariably fell short.

The military commanders also played a vital role in keeping law and order and, along with the “eyes and ears” of the king, prevented the *satraps* from inciting rebellion or creating chaos in the land. They commanded their own squadrons stationed within the *satrapies*. Rather than to the *satrap*, however, the military commanders were responsible to the monarch and to his appointed secretaries only. The military commanders contributed to the Immortal guards and, consequently, served the prime minister by commanding the elite core of one thousand that guarded the king. As the first units to enter the battlefield, the forces of the military commanders were the most reliable; in fact, they were the main executors of the king’s offensive and defensive strategies.

The later Achaemenids, beginning with Xerxes I after his defeat at Salamis, abandoned the practices that had brought their ancestors glory and their nation prosperity. They no longer headed their armies in battle nor did they examine the quality or the suitability of the recruits that were sent from the *satrapies* for duty in the army of the king.²⁶⁷ Drawn more to harem intrigue than to the arena of world politics, the last monarchs relegated major decisions to incompetent flatterers and, when needed, imposed their will through intimidation and cruelty. Not surprisingly, they no longer enjoyed the loyalty and respect of their subjects. Furthermore, their international negotiations entailed enormous expenses that put a heavy burden on the treasury and, consequently, on the public. More importantly, their actions were detrimental to the well being of the middle class that had been created by the earlier rulers in order to stimulate the economy and keep the administrative wheels of the empire lubricated. Under the last Achaemenids, the economy became stagnant, the *satrapies* became unruly, and the peasantry became destitute. More important, there was a dearth of men who could guide the empire.

What caused this vacuum in leadership? It was partially due to the tradition by which ancient Iranians chose the successor to their king. From among the sons of the king, the one who had been born during his kingship was given priority. Additionally, it was important if the queen was from the Achaemenid line and close to the *farr*. Whether there were other sons of the king who were more meritorious was not important. This is how Xerxes I became king. Later monarchs evaded even this tradition. Rather than educating and promoting their next-of-kin for leadership, they eliminated all claimants to the throne. They also killed the generals, nobles, and would-be supporters of those claimants.

Cyrus and Darius, mindful of the difficulties that confront a new king, had created the *satrap* system. During their rule the system helped the monarch ascertain the needs of his subjects and, through meritorious *satraps*, respond to those needs. Later Achaemenids, as long as the *satraps* sent in the revenues and kept the *satrapy* quiet, left the *satrapies* on their own. They interfered in the affairs of the *satrapies* only when the atrocities committed by the *satraps* resulted in

rebellion. Then they descended on the *satrapies* and treated them as if they were a foreign force to be conquered. As a result, the *satrapies* deteriorated to the point that Greek mercenaries could aspire to become *satraps*. Indeed, towards the end of the empire, when the King of Kings needed the combined forces of the empire to repel the advances of the Greek city-states in Asia, rather than help, the *satraps* were raising banners of rebellion, each trying to carve out kingdoms of their own from the moribund body of the empire.

The main concern of the throne during those dark days was to keep the Greeks away from Persian cities on the Aegean coast. Before the rise of Philip II of Macedon, Iranian strategy consisted of dispersal of gold and implementation of oriental intrigue. In the final analysis, gold and intrigue resulted in unbridled corruption and treachery. It is true that this strategy kept the *satrapies* in Asia Minor away from Greek takeover, but it did nothing for the *satrapies* like Egypt and Syria that carried the burden of the taxes that provided funds for the largesse. In the end, the unhappy *satrapies* rebelled, putting an end to the funds that fed into the prevention strategy. It also put an end to the contributions of Greek mercenaries that kept the western *satrapies* afloat.

Darius III came to power against this bleak background of failed policies and incompetent leadership. His enemy was Philip II of Macedon, who had been authorized by the League of Corinth to make sure that Persians would never set foot in Athens again. Incompetent, cunning, and indecisive, Darius III could not withstand the advance of the Macedonian army. Alexander defeated him at Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela (331 BCE). He fled before Macedonia's advancing army to Central Asia, where he was murdered by one of his own *satraps* in 330 BCE. With the death of Darius III, the Achaemenid Empire came to an end.

THE INVASION OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

(c. 336–323 BCE)

Contacts between Iran and Western cultures took place in early antiquity. The best known, of course, were the wars waged by Darius I the Great and Xerxes I against the Greek city-states. Continuation of these hostilities ultimately led to the invasion of Asia by Alexander of Macedon in 334 BCE, when an incompetent king, Darius III, ruled a weak Persian Empire.

Known as the son of Zeus and the true son of Achilles, Alexander ruled for thirteen years. He was born in Pella, Macedonia (now in Greece), in 356 BCE to Philip II, king of Macedonia, and Olympias, the daughter of the king of Epirus. Throughout her life, Olympias refused to accept that Philip II was Alexander's father. "Zeus," she insisted, "was Alexander's real father."

From childhood, Alexander's attention was drawn to politics and the military. His early training at the hand of his mother's uncle, Leonidas, provided him with a healthy body, as well as a strong will. At the age of thirteen, he was turned over to Aristotle who, for three years, taught him zoology, medicine, astronomy,

philosophy, logic, poetics, ethics, and politics. Aristotle also taught the young prince much about the world of his time, especially about the Persians. Aristotle taught Alexander that the enslaved Persians, ignorant of etiquette, the arts, and sciences, were waiting to be liberated from the tyranny of their kings.

Alexander received his military training from his father. King Philip II, in semi-formal sessions, taught Alexander the art of warfare. But more important, he fully involved the young prince in the affairs of state, allowing him to put his theoretical knowledge of politics into practice. Often, Philip II sent Alexander as his representative to important negotiations with the southern Greek states. It was with Alexander's aid, for instance, that Philip finally garnered the title of the Supreme Commander of all Greek Forces, poised to liberate the Greek domains long held by the Persians on the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea in Asia.

Philip II was killed in 336 BCE. Having eliminated all rivals with the aid of his mother, Olympias, the twenty-two-year old Alexander was elected by the army as the new king of Macedonia. He also retained Philip II's title of the Supreme Commander of all Greek Forces that, at the time, were being trained and organized for a war against the Persian "barbarians." The main motive of the Greeks in this invasion, besides economic and political gains, was vengeance. Under Xerxes I, the Persians had marched into Athens and set fire to the Acropolis. The Greeks now intended to humiliate the Persians.

At this time, the Persian Empire consisted of the present-day independent republics of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and northwestern Pakistan. In the center it consisted of present-day Iran and to the west, the contemporary Middle East, including Egypt and Asia Minor. Out of the twenty-eight *satrapies* into which the empire was divided, Egypt had been the most troublesome for the Achaemenid monarchs, even for Darius I and Xerxes I.

In the three battles that ensued between Darius III and Alexander III, the armies on both sides were tested for organization, strategy, and loyalty. At the heart of Alexander's army was the cavalry, which consisted of approximately 6,100 riders out of a total personnel count of 65,000.²⁶⁸ After the cavalry had driven a wedge into enemy lines, the infantry phalanx with their long spears and shields took over. The loyalty of the Greek troops was to Alexander, their general and god-king. The Persian army, always superior in number of troops, was commanded by the Persian nobility. In that army, blood ties and closeness to the king, the court in general, and the king's *satraps* determined and secured each commander's rank and sphere of activity; merit, ability, and experience were of secondary, often even tertiary, concern. Furthermore, a considerable number of the fighting men of the Iranian army, including the famous commander Memnon, were Greek mercenaries who continuously exerted less effort than they had been paid for.

In addition, the Greeks had gained much knowledge about, and insight into, the Persians' way of life from contacts with Persian ambassadors and traders who frequented their coasts. Using this knowledge, the Greeks had evaluated the military might of Persia carefully, had studied her land mass for strategic points, and had learned about her war tactics and weaponry. This information further

enabled the Greeks not only to devise new and better tactics, but also to forge appropriate weapons with which to penetrate the ranks of the Persian army, which relied on superior numbers instead of advancement through the ranks, merit, and militarism.

The first battle between Alexander's army and the forces of Darius III was at the Granicus River in 334 BCE. The Persian defenders, in spite of the advantage of the strategically important heights they commanded, failed to implement their main plan to eliminate Alexander in a melee. On the contrary, two thousand of their troops were captured and dispatched to Macedonia as prisoners of war, while the rest of the army withdrew to the east, to Issus. At this point, Memnon advised a scorched-earth policy to force Alexander to give up the fight. Darius rejected that proposal. Alexander marched victoriously into Sardis and, on his way to Issus, loosened the Gordian Knot in Central Anatolia (333 BCE).²⁶⁹

Darius III chose Issus for his decisive battle with Alexander because Issus was placed strategically at the junction of Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt. He intended to prevent Alexander from entering either Mesopotamia or Egypt. But that, too, was not to be. The Persian defeat at Issus was more disastrous than at Granicus—Darius's family and his entire entourage fell into Greek hands. From now on, Darius had to negotiate for the ceasing of hostilities against his nation while pleading with Alexander for the life and well being of his family. He went so far as to offer to cede most of the lands to the west of the Euphrates to the invader. Alexander rejected the offer.

At the risk of Darius III's regrouping and coming at him in full force, Alexander decided to dispossess Persia of Egypt before heading for Mesopotamia and the Persian heartland. Between Issus and Egypt, however, there were three major, wealthy Phoenician cities: Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. Of the three, Tyre resisted even in the face of a long siege. Eventually, Tyre, too, like the other cities before it, fell to Alexander (332 BCE). It took a seven-month-long siege, however, before it surrendered. After this most spectacular victory of his military career, Alexander entered Egypt, where he was received with open arms. There he founded a city that still bears his name: Alexandria. Then he consulted the oracle at Amon-Re to confirm his vision of the world. While the Greek oracle at Delphi had already confirmed that he was the son of Zeus, Amon-Re confirmed that he was also the son of the god Amon and that he would conquer the whole of the known world. Alexander left Egypt in 331 BCE.

Alexander was adored by the men in the military. To them he was the tactician who never erred and the general who never lost a battle. He knew when to rest his soldiers, when to strike the enemy and, more important, where to get provisions for his host. In addition, his troops always received handsome purses for their efforts in battle, money that they could send home for their loved ones or invest for the future of their children and of Greece.

The last battle between Darius III and Alexander took place on the plain of Gaugamela, near what is now Mosul, in present-day Iraq. Again the Persian army was routed—and for the last time. After this victory, the gates of the cities of

Babylon, Susa, Persepolis, and Ecbatana were thrown wide open to the conqueror.

Darius III fled, leaving behind his entourage and his harem, while Alexander marched into one of the most exquisite sights in antiquity, the ceremonial palace of Persepolis with its Apadana and the Hall of 100 Columns of Xerxes. Alexander stayed in Persepolis long enough to make sure that the gold furnishings and the precious stones that had decorated the doors and walls of the palace (10,000 mules and 6,000 camels carried the load) were on their way to Greece. At the end, before leaving for Susa, Ecbatana, and Rayy, he sacrificed the palace to the gods as a symbol of his great devotion and as a signal to the Persian *satraps*, notables, and *mu'bad*s that the might and glory of Persia was now a thing of the past. The pillaging of the city and the rape of women and girls accompanied the burning of Persepolis.

Sources speak about Alexander's burning the text of the *Avesta* and describe the *Avesta* as one of the largest texts at the time.²⁷⁰ The reality is that the *Avesta* could not have been written in the eastern Iranian languages because, at that time, eastern Iranian was not a written language. What can be said, however, is that Alexander eliminated the *mu'bad*s, who carried the knowledge contained in the *Avesta*. Alexander deprived the Iranians of that knowledge.²⁷¹

After Persepolis, Alexander pursued Darius relentlessly until word finally came that Bessus, one of Darius's own *satraps* in Bactria, had killed the monarch. Alexander was also apprised that the same Bessus had proclaimed himself the new king of Bactria. Bessus was hunted down and, upon being captured, was executed at the hands of Persian loyalists for the murder of Darius. Bactria, with its capital at the city of Bactra, received special consideration and became the center for dissemination of Hellenism in Asia. Before Alexander stood the Hindu Kush and, beyond it, the fertile river valleys of the Oxus, Jaxartes, and Zarafshan. Alexander headed for Sughdia, where he refurbished the city of Samarkand around 328 BCE. Having reduced Central Asia, Alexander was now ready to invade India and complete his conquest of the rest of the world.

In India, the monsoons put an end to Alexander's grandiose plan of world conquest. Tired and uncompromising, his commanders and soldiers refused to go any farther into Asia. Promising that he would return to finish the task, Alexander agreed to return to Babylon by way of the Gedrusian desert in present-day Baluchistan. In the course of the long and arduous march that followed, over two thousand men, women, and children died of thirst, snakebite, and sheer exhaustion. Shortly after that, Alexander himself died suddenly in Babylon in 323 BCE, at the age of thirty-two. His embalmed body, placed in a golden coffin, was sent to Greece for burial. However, Ptolemy, Alexander's general, took Alexander's body to Alexandria, Egypt, and put it on public display before burial. What happened to Alexander's corpse after that, nobody knows.

An extraordinary individual, Alexander rejected the norms of his time. Although Aristotle had taught him that the Persians were uncouth barbarians devoid of civilization, in practice he sought to understand Persian culture. More important, he planned to forge a union in which Greeks and Persians could shed

the ignorance and hatred of the past and put an end to isolationism and hostility.

To achieve that new world, Alexander set out to repopulate the old world with offspring of mixed Greek and Persian marriages. Fusing the educational efforts of the two cultures, Alexander had concluded, required a new set of family values. Leading the formation of the future family unit, therefore, Alexander himself chose a Persian bride, Roxana (Roshanak), and 10,000 others for his soldiers and generals. He also facilitated the instruction of 30,000 youths from the best Iranian families in Greek language, customs, and military science. Furthermore, Persian soldiers were included in the infantry while Persian *satraps* and commanders were retained at their previous posts.

One of his most controversial actions was the addition of the regal robe of the King of Kings of Persia to his wardrobe. Donning the purple silk robe, which was an exclusive symbol of kingship and which he wore very well, he appeared before his unhappy commanders advocating tolerance and cooperation, the hallmarks of his new empire.

Alexander's demand that they should obey him as they would have a Persian monarch, did not sit well with Greek generals who had fought with him at Granicus, Issus, and Gaugamela. Refusing to prostrate themselves before Alexander, they tried instead to reach him and hold him in their arms in the manner of Greek commanders. Adhering to the long-standing tradition of Persian kingship, however, Alexander discouraged all personal proximity, signaling that, like the Kings of Kings preceding him, he regarded the royal space around the throne to be sacred. Kneeling (*proskynos*) and kissing the ground before him were the options left to those who visited Alexander. Furious at Alexander's new ways, Cleitus, who called Alexander an "effeminate general," echoed the sentiments of most Greeks, who regarded the young ruler a bastard. In retaliation for his insolence, and at the cost of great personal distress, Alexander killed Cleitus on the spot.

Alexander's sudden death deprived him of a chance to make arrangements for a successor. The army chose Alexander's half-brother, Philip III, and his unborn son, Alexander IV, to succeed him, but neither choice guaranteed the unity necessary for the success of Alexander's cultural fusion program. Real power was divided between Antipater in Greece and Perdiccas in Asia, with many other ambitious generals—Antigonos and Seleucus among them—vying for power. Of those able commanders, Antigonos finally eclipsed the rest and emerged as the future ruler of Europe and Asia. Seleucus and others temporarily obeyed him.

While Alexander had used the military might of Greece to forge political and cultural unity among the peoples of Europe and Asia, Antigonos used the military to eliminate those of Alexander's commanders, especially Ptolemy and Seleucus, who aspired to form powerful dynasties of their own. Out of the struggle that ensued, Alexander's empire emerged divided, torn between the Macedonian monarchy headed by Antigonos in Europe, the Ptolemaic monarchy in Egypt and southern Syria, and the Seleucid monarchy under Seleucus I in the East.

The founder of the Seleucid Dynasty was Seleucus I Nicator (conqueror), whose father, Antiochus,²⁷² was one of Philip II's commanders.²⁷³ After the capture of Susa, Seleucus became one of Alexander's trusted generals, commanding several thousand warriors. He also proved his value in the battle on the Hydaspes River in India. Like Alexander, he had an Iranian wife, Apama, whom Alexander had chosen for him.²⁷⁴ At the time of Alexander's death, he commanded the cavalry. In the struggle for succession that followed Alexander's death, Seleucus defeated Antigonus, captured Babylonia in 312 BCE, and marched into Media and the lands to the east. The east, at the time, besides present-day Iran, included four other provinces (i.e., the *satrapies* of Bactria and Sughdia, Kabulistan and its environs, Herat and Sistan, and Qandahar and Baluchistan).

The Seleucid Empire, although unwieldy, lasted for 250 years. It consisted of two major parts: Eastern and Western. In the East, it consisted of Iran and the four major *satrapies* of Bactria, Sughdia, Kabulistan (included Herat and Sistan), and Qandahar (included Baluchistan). In the West, it consisted of Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine, and often most of Anatolia. The two parts of the Empire were related to each other through trade along the Silk Road. Since it lacked a unifying identity and could not replenish its Greco-Macedonian soldiery, the Seleucid Empire mostly lost rather than gained territory.

Seleucus I (ca. 358–281 BCE), who had begun his career as a Macedonian nobleman and soldier under Alexander, established the Seleucid dynasty in 312 BCE. He ruled over Syria, Persia, Phoenicia, Babylonia, and many other provinces of the former Achaemenid Empire.

Like Alexander, Seleucus was resolute, brave, and benevolent. He was also a builder, constructing more than sixty cities, including one capital city on the Tigris called Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and another on the Orontes, in Syria, called Antioch. In time, these cities became two of the most powerful commercial centers of the region.

Unlike Alexander, Seleucus regarded the conquered peoples as inferior to Greeks. Consequently, his royal road that connected main centers of commerce did not contribute to the expansion of Greek culture into the eastern provinces as had been Alexander's wish. In fact, Seleucus's policies created friction between the indigenous populations and the new rulers, resulting in hostility and division at a time when the kingdom needed unity and harmony.

In administration, with the exception of fiscal matters, Seleucus left the practices of the Achaemenids and Alexander untouched. His only minor concession in this regard was raising the number of the *satrapies* to seventy-two, allowing non-Greek elements a slightly higher degree of influence in the governance of the state. But even this concession was not genuine. Many of the newly formed *satrapies* had been projected as "sacrificial lambs" for gaining stability in the rest of the nation. This new move saw the light when, in 305 BCE, in the course of a visit to the East and in the context of his battles with the rulers to his west, Seleucus I made a deal with Chandragupta, the king of India. He agreed to

give up the territories to the south of the Hindu Kush (i.e., present-day Afghanistan and Baluchistan), to Chandragupta in exchange for 500 elephants to be used in battles against his adversaries in Mesopotamia.

Like all the other dynasties of the past, the Seleucid Dynasty had its strong and weak points. The strength of the empire rested in its vast domain and its well-organized network of Greek cities, especially Seleucia and Antioch. Its weak points were a crisis of identity, internal instability, and zealous neighbors. The crisis of identity was because the Seleucid rulers did not possess the *farr*. As a result, they did not enjoy the support of the Iranians who constituted the main population of the country they ruled. Their other predicament was that kingdoms to their east and west constantly attacked them. In the east, they were attacked by the Central Asian nomads from without and by their own provincial governors (old *satraps*), who sought independence for Iran, from within. In the West, they were attacked by Egypt and Rome. Rome, Iran, and Egypt all considered themselves the rightful claimants to Alexander's legacy. Most of the energy of the Seleucids was spent in the West, leaving the east in the hands of virtually autonomous governors.

A solution to the loyalty problem had been tested in Egypt, where Greek rulers had reintroduced the concept of a deified king. Thinking that that solution might resolve their problem in Iran as well, the Seleucids adopted the plan. The strategy did not work. Rather than unify the peoples, the concept of a god-king, as opposed to a divinely appointed king, created discord and division for obvious reasons. The Egyptians were used to being governed by human beings who called themselves god. The Persians were not. Neither the legendary kings of Iran—Kayumars, Kayka'us, and Kaykhosrau—nor the historical monarchs—Darius and Cyrus—had considered themselves god. They had spoken strongly about their being appointees of *Ahura Mazda*, but not *Ahura Mazda* Himself. Jamshid, the only legendary monarch to be so disposed, lost his *farr* simply because he tried to reach the stars and the abode of God.

After the death of Seleucus I, his son Antiochus I Soter (the savior) (281–261 BCE) firmly established himself as god in 281 BCE. Statues of his divine person were placed in all the Greek cities of the empire. He flooded the plateau with Greek immigrants, who introduced Hellenism into Iran. Under Antiochus I, Greek motifs in art, architecture, and Greek urban planning entered the east.

The kings who succeeded him also chose similar titles: Theos (god) and Epiphanes (appearance of god), for instance. But neither the deification of the king nor the saturation of the cities of the empire with Greek citizens imported from Europe could fill the vacuum created by a genuine national identity crisis. In fact, by 256 BCE, under Antiochus II, a united East comprised of Bactria, Sughdia, and Merv had come into existence. This confederation successfully fought the Seleucids and, in 249 BCE, established the Greco-Bactrian kingdom with commercial ties to Alexander's Indian lands (now held by Indian Rajas). In 247 BCE, Parthia also broke away and established a capital at Nesa (near present-day Ashkabad in Turkmenistan).

The loss of Bactria and Parthia was followed by a gradual dissolution of the

entire Empire. Antiochus III (223–187 BCE), the greatest Seleucid king, restored most of the lost territories only to be defeated by Rome, in both Greece (191 BCE) and in Asia Minor (190 BCE).

The move by Parthia not only curtailed Greek interests in the East but also jeopardized the territorial integrity of Bactria, which, once it became isolated, fell victim to the Yüeh-chih nomads. The demise of Bactria brought Parthia prosperity and allowed it to expand westward into Seleucid territory.

The breaking away of Bactria and Parthia was not so much due to the strength of those *satrapies*, although strength was a factor in the equation, but more due to the weakness of the Seleucid Empire under Antiochus II. As mentioned, the Seleucid Empire lacked national unity, a shortcoming that did not go unnoticed by the Western powers still vying for their shares of Alexander's Eastern gains. In order to reach their ends, therefore, the Western powers followed policies that aimed at a gradual strengthening of the restive Eastern provinces of the former Persian Empire. They continued supporting those *satrapies* until they overcame the Seleucids and gained their independence.

In 188 BCE, Antiochus II was forced to relinquish all Seleucid holdings in Asia Minor. The Seleucid Empire, reduced to Syria, was dismantled in 64 BCE, when Syria became a province of the Roman Empire. The legacy of the Seleucids, however, continued on and Greek remained the language of commerce, government, and learning.

Taking advantage of the next two weak rulers, Seleucus II and Seleucus III, the Parthians appeared on the Euphrates, rapidly expanding their domain. However, not only was their advance stopped there, but they were pushed back by Antiochus III the Great (223–187 BCE) who, once again, expanded the Seleucid Empire as far as India. This dramatic change of events returned the Parthian kings, if only temporarily, to their past positions, namely the governance of the *satrapies* for the Seleucids. Emboldened by this victory in the East, Antiochus III, upon his return to Antioch, invaded the lands to his west. He intended to annex Macedonia and, in the process, revive the empire of Alexander. But, at Magnesia, Rome, protecting the interests of the Western world, dealt Antiochus III a fatal blow. Following the accord reached at Apamea, Antiochus III gave up all his possessions in Asia Minor, and, of course, he lost all the prestige that he had gained in the East. Predictably, the Parthians regained their lost territories and reestablished their rule as the heirs of Achaemenes.

One of Alexander's plans was to relocate some Europeans in the East and, conversely, some peoples from the East in Europe. The Seleucids wanted to implement this project but found it to be very costly. Implementing half of the project, they moved Greeks into Eastern cities and made them lords of the areas in which they lived. Alexander's total plan of fusion of peoples of Asia and Europe through mixed marriages never saw the light.

As a result of the implementation of half of Alexander's plan, the Seleucids built many cities and populated them with Greeks. Antioch, Seleucia, and many others are the remnants of these cities, which stretched from the confines of China

to western Anatolia.

In summary, the Seleucids decentralized the governmental structures introduced by Darius I. As a result, administration was weakened. Eventually, it was replaced by a feudalistic system. The Seleucid court was organized as follows. There was a god-king, the same tradition that the Ptolemies had followed in Egypt. Relatives of the ruler were placed in key positions in the government. The court consisted of dignitaries and court officials like physicians and chamberlains. There were also a Consultative Assembly headed by the Prime Minister, and a Communications Bureau.

Contrary to Alexander's wishes, the Seleucids did not consider Iranians as equals. They called them barbarians and, except in the cities in Asia Minor, where Persians and Greeks had lived together for a long time, the Greeks discriminated against the Iranians.

THE LEGACY OF ALEXANDER

The rise of Cyrus the Great is important both for his establishment of an empire and for bringing peoples as distant as Lydia and Cyropolis together. Building on Cyrus's accomplishments, Darius exposed the cultures that Cyrus had nurtured to his own brand of Zoroastrian thought and *Ahuric* Order and took that way of life to Europe. He intended to form Iranian colonies in Europe that, once interconnected, would lead to the establishment of the *Ahuric* Order and the worship of *Ahura Mazda* throughout the world. Darius's plan, however, did not succeed. As we have seen, Darius was defeated at Marathon by the Greek city-states, and his vast empire gradually disintegrated.

The Iranians' determination to conquer the West was fueled by their duty to preserve and expand the *Ahuric* Order set forth by *Ahura Mazda* as the only way for salvation for humanity. In this effort, they followed the deeds of such great figures as Kaykhosrau, who had defeated the Khaqan of China and who had reestablished Mazdaism in Turan. With a divinely appointed warrior-king like Darius at the head of a huge army, the Iranians were certain of victory over the disparate armies of the Greek city-states.

But the city-states were neither disunited nor weak; they drew strength from their long-standing experience with democracy and from institutions based on a rational approach to governance and administration. In addition to allowing social mobility and political freedom, the Greeks used their knowledge of the sciences to create superior weapons, as well as command viable, merit-based military and naval forces. The West's encounters with the Persians at Marathon, and later at Salamis, had enhanced their opportunity to improve their defenses. It even had encouraged them to a change of strategy from a defensive attitude against the East to an offensive stance. The League of Corinth in 337 BCE, in which all Greek city-states except Sparta had participated, was a direct outcome of the new attitude born of the West's trust in the invincibility of democratic institutions.

Alexander of Macedon, the commander of the Pan-Hellenic forces, utilized the power that the democratic institutions and the technological progress of the time afforded him and became not only the ruler of the greater part of the world of his time, but also the potential founder of the type of empire that Darius had hoped to establish. After achieving victory in all fronts, and in order to promote Hellenism, the roots of which rested in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Alexander created small Greek-ruled enclaves in present-day Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, and he trusted those small kingdoms to a mixed leadership of Eastern and Western rulers. Before long, Greek rule and Alexander became beacons of hope for a world in disarray; they were looked to not only for leadership but also for the establishment of new societal norms.

Alexander's task was enormous—in some ways more taxing than providing strategy, provision, and incentive for his large army to fight in Asia. He had to rule two very different domains. Though united under the alliance of Corinth, one was still not fully devoid of anti-Macedonian sentiments, and the other had been divided even under its own Kings of Kings. Iran under the last Achaemenids was a kingdom fraught with struggle for power and intrigue. Could Alexander, even temporarily, tolerate the excesses of divine rulership while creating a medium that promoted democracy? His decision on the nature of the new order was crucial to the future of the two nations as well as to the world as a whole.

Alexander knew for certain that had it not been for Darius's defeat at Marathon in 490 BCE, Greeks would not have had the opportunity to live their lives in freedom and nurture their culture to what it was during his time. There was no question, therefore, that Greek institutions were central to his overall strategy. Why had the superior armies of Iran been defeated twice by smaller numbers of Greeks? A study of the defeats of Darius and Xerxes revealed that the Persian kings had been burdened with an enormous amount of responsibility, much more responsibility than one individual could carry. It was in the nature of divine kingship that only the king possessed the required insight into the inner workings of the cosmos, and only he could uphold the primordial *Ahuric* Order. Put differently, Darius and Xerxes were defeated not so much because they were lacking in ability, but because they were handicapped by the very force that had made them Kings of Kings. How could the same individual chart military strategy, deploy troops, and provide for an enormous army while, single-handedly, attending to internal intrigue and international diplomacy?

Alexander did not have to go far for an answer. Rather than being permeated with the will of a deity, Greek culture promoted personal choice, freedom, and mobility for all. The individual had the right to participate in all affairs and contribute to the shaping of future events. Affairs of state were discussed in the open among those knowledgeable, and solutions to complicated issues were arrived at in general meetings and after reaching a consensus. The elected leaders' sense of nationalism, patriotism, and valor uniquely qualified them for their responsibilities. Yet, bringing together these divergent philosophies and offering the new empire a cause around which its multi-lingual and multi-cultural peoples could rally was not

an easy task. However, Alexander thought he could solve the problem with the same ease with which he had undone the knot at Gordium. The result of his efforts, had they come into fruition, would have been an empire that was Persian in form but Greek in content. Neither his Greek commanders nor his Iranian subjects were in favor of this strategy.

Nevertheless, capitalizing on the good will of those who trusted him, Alexander began the implementation of his Hellenization program while still in Central Asia. There, as well as in Afghanistan and Iran, he built garrison cities, water works, bridges, and fortifications, giving substance to Darius's wish to create a communication network that would unite the world of the time, and he laid the foundation of a unified culture.

The divisions among the peoples of Asia and Europe, however, were too deeply set to be easily breached. Like the Greeks, the Iranians, too, were skeptical of Alexander's designs for their homeland. The Zoroastrian *mu'bad*s, our main local source of information, for instance, held Alexander responsible for the destruction of Iranian culture. Referring to him with the epithet *gijastag* (accursed), they blamed him for the destruction of their temples of fire and the murder of all their priests, their only source for a correct rendition of the holy *Avesta*. Their hatred for Alexander became even more intense in subsequent years as *Ahura Mazda* was gradually eclipsed by Zeus, *Mithra* by Apollo, *Verethragna* by Heracles, *Ashi* by Nike, and *Armaiti* by Demeter.²⁷⁵ The *mu'bad*s sought ways whereby they could influence events and avert the impending destruction of their faith, but the task was not easy, especially as long as Parthian princes continued to import Roman ways into Iran through their frequent and lengthy stays in Rome.

The romantic and the traditional saw a different Alexander. Identifying the Macedonian with such illustrious Iranian hero-saints as Kaykhosrau, they imagined him searching for the fountain of youth in regions that only their fertile imaginations could create. In his ceaseless search for the elixir, King Iskandar encountered countless difficulties and strange creatures, including talking trees and talking snakes. He even met people with ears so large that the owners used them as blankets to rest upon. Within a short time, the Iranian story tellers took Alexander so deeply into Persian culture that little of his Macedonian identity remained.

Alongside the *mu'bad*s and the romantically oriented were many Iranians who were impressed with the Greeks' attitude toward trade, travel, and adventure. They saw a change in the script, making reading texts easier, a major contribution.²⁷⁶ They appreciated the way that the Greeks had employed proficiency in mathematics, medicine, geography, history, and the arts to improve aspects of life still in primitive stages in their own land. But what was perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Greek culture was the Greeks' philosophical approach to religion and to the nature of the deity. Before long, many Iranians found themselves listening to Greek music and poetry, attending Greek theater, and imitating Greek paintings and the plastic arts. It was also with the help of these same people that Alexander built roads and cities and promoted diversity as far and wide as he did. Knowing that Alexander had been subjected to at least four known conspiracies,

all with the aim of stopping his liberal stance in relation to the conquered peoples,²⁷⁷ these like-minded Persians believed in Alexander's sincerity and in his quest for a true fusion of the cultures of East and West. After all, Alexander had liberated those in the middle of the Iranian pyramid of power—the merchants, craftsmen, and bureaucrats—and had pushed the frontiers aside, ushering commerce and the flow of new and vibrant ideas into Iran by both land and sea. The equity and justice that permeated society and the prosperity that was in such stark contrast to what had transpired under the recent kings and satraps, were the results of the liberal measures of the new ruler.

Although Alexander did not assign an heir to his vast empire, his program of fusion of cultures was not totally abandoned. The generals who followed him, in spite of the intense struggle for power that consumed their time, carried out Alexander's wishes by building Greek centers wherein Greek power was preserved. They also followed Alexander's economic program as a result of which Iran, for instance, could export clothing, ornaments, drugs, precious stones, carpets, seed corn, lead, and pedigreed dogs. But none of these, not even the return to the ease and comfort of the earlier days, gave Iranians cause to rejoice. The root cause of the Iranians' scorn rested in Alexander's policy for change for Iran. In his egalitarian society, Alexander had placed the interests of the Greeks first, promoting the superficial but attractive aspects of Iranian culture. The discriminatory nature of this treatment did not reveal itself until toward the end of the Parthian era. At that time it became obvious that Aramaic and Old Persian, the languages of the Achaemenids, had given way to Greek and that the fundamental tenets of Zoroastrianism had ceded to Greek interpretation. Subsequent rulers, especially the first Sassanid monarchs, reacted very strongly against this trend. The later Parthians' reaction to Hellenism is reflected in their collection of the text of the Avesta, while the Sassanids reestablished Zoroastrian orthodoxy and strengthened the ancient social order.

THE PARTHIANS

Very little information remains about the longest ruling house of Iran, the Parthian Dynasty, which for some four hundred years held sway over most of the lands previously ruled by the Achaemenids.²⁷⁸ What information exists is culled from the writings of Western writers like Appian of Alexandria, Athenaeus, Orosius, Justinian, and Poseidonius, who often mix the political history of Parthia with that of the unstable Seleucids, resulting in a distorted picture of the activities of both dynasties during this period of Iranian history. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the Sassanids systematically erased all vestiges of Parthian Iran by defacing monuments and remodeling statues. The Sassanids even reduced the Parthian era by two centuries to avert an apocalypse foretold by the Prophet Zoroaster.

Geographically, the original home of the Parthians was east of Ecbatana and

Rayy and west of Herat, the present-day province of Khorasan.²⁷⁹ The states neighboring Parthia were Sistan to the south, Merv and Khwarazm to the north, Herat to the east, and Hyrcania (present-day Gorgan) to the west. Linguistically, the Parthians belonged to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family. They spoke an Iranian language, the remnants of which are extant in Parthian Middle Persian texts discovered at Turfan.

Culturally, the Parthians were from the nomadic peoples of the steppe. Love of the hunt and hard drinking were among their distinguishing characteristics, as was use of the bow and arrow, especially as a lethal weapon.²⁸⁰ Once on a swift horse, the Parthian archer did not have a match. Historically, Parthia was acquired by Cyrus the Great as a part of his initial thrust east, and it remained in the empire until the defeat of Darius III and the fall of the empire. Parthia surrendered to Alexander without a fight.²⁸¹

As mentioned, in relation to the political history of the Seleucids, during the rule of Antiochus II, Diodotus, the *satrap* of Bactria, rebelled against the Seleucid ruler and pronounced himself the king of Bactria. At a time when the Seleucid ruler was engaged in the west fighting a war with Egypt, Parthia, too, rose against Antiochus II.²⁸² In subsequent decades, the Parthians, unlike the Greco-Bactrians, who were easily overrun by the Yüeh-chih, consolidated their territorial gains and expanded their domain considerably until it reached from Herat to Babylonia and Assyria.²⁸³ The architects of the burgeoning Parthian Empire were Mithradates I and Mithradates II.²⁸⁴ The former, like Cyrus II the Great, founded the empire while the latter, like Darius I, consolidated his predecessor's gains by organizing the military and reforming the administration.²⁸⁵

Mithradates I, striking out of Parthia proper, quickly annexed Media, Persis, Babylonia, and Assyria in the West, and Herat, Sistan, and Gedrosia to the East. Understanding the strategic value of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris for trade and for the cultural hold it created on Seleucid possessions in general, he built the garrison city of Ctesiphon directly opposite Seleucia. In time, Ctesiphon became Parthia's fourth and most powerful center, holding the expansionist aspirations of Rome at bay.

Mithradates I died in 137 BCE. At his death, Parthia consisted of Parthia proper, Hyrcania, Media, Babylonia, Assyria, Elam, and Persis. Phraates II and his uncle, Artabanus II, who followed him, barely held the empire together. Expansion to the west, which had been a most likely scenario at the death of Mithradates I, was no longer possible due to the invasion of the Yüeh-chih nomads who, having overrun the Greco-Bactrian kingdom to the east of Parthia, now threatened Parthia as well.²⁸⁶

Under Mithradates II, the situation changed again. Mithradates II pushed the nomad invaders away from Parthian borders all the way to Sughdia, recapturing all lost territories, including Merv, Herat, and Sistan. He also consolidated Parthian power in the West. After Mithradates II, the survival of the Parthian Dynasty was assured. Henceforth, the questions were one of territorial expansion, the degree of economic and political might, and a friendly or hostile stance vis-à-vis the West.

The history of Parthia, its turbulent relations with the lingering Seleucid

Empire, and with Imperial Rome, is long, involved, and recursive; it cannot be covered in the space allowed here. That history, however, can be summarized and divided into three main phases, with each phase building on the activities and ideological trends of the previous phase.

The first phase dealt with the expansion and consolidation of the Parthian Empire as the Parthian capital moved from Nisa to Hectampylos, to Ecbatana and, eventually, to Ctesiphon. During this phase, the fortunes of the Seleucids waned until their empire was totally eclipsed by Rome. The empire of the Parthians, on the other hand, waxed, making them a formidable power in Mesopotamia. A main feature of this phase is the existence of friendly relations between Rome and Parthia that reached their zenith during the rule of Augustus Caesar (27 BCE–14 CE), when many Parthian princes were the guests of the Roman court. At that time Greek language and Greco-Roman culture permeated Iran to such a degree that for some Iranians, the Iranian past had become all but a dream.²⁸⁷

The truce between Rome and Parthia was motivated by commercial as well as political concerns. Both nations regarded the Seleucids as usurpers of their natural rights and both strove to weaken Seleucid hold on the lands between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates by implementing policies that undermined Seleucid interests in the region. These anti-Seleucid policies eventually resulted in the collapse of the Seleucid Empire.

Phase two was a continuation of the first phase only in the sense that cordial relations between Parthia and Rome were honored. There was, however, a major difference. As rivals, Rome and Parthia intended to dispossess each other of territory that had been held by their predecessors. Rome, as the inheritor of the legacy of Alexander, regarded the Parthian feudal lords expendable and, consequently, looked upon Syria and Egypt as future Roman territory. The Parthians considered themselves the rightful descendants of the Achaemenid kings. Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor, they believed, were rightfully theirs. Meanwhile, however, they followed the dictates of diplomacy and adhered to a policy of coexistence. The only country that was constantly in dispute was Armenia, which changed hands a number of times.²⁸⁸

By the end of the second phase, the policy of coexistence had cost the Parthians dearly. Superior Roman culture was quickly absorbing all vestiges of Parthian culture, including religious institutions. Greek and Roman gods, for instance, had replaced the Iranian *Yazatas* such that Zeus had replaced *Ahura Mazda*; Apollo had replaced *Mithra*; Heracles Kalinikos had replaced *Verethragna*; Nike had replaced *Ashi*; and Demeter had replaced *Armaiti*. Furthermore, the statues of the new gods were on display everywhere.

In Bactria, the new adherents had given their own names to the Iranian deities: Ashaeikhsho for *Asha Vahishta*; Shaoreoro for *Khshathra Vairya*; Miuro for *Mithra*; Orlando for *Verethragna*; and Lrooaspa for *Druvaspa* (divinity of horses). Even the word *farr* had its own Bactrian counterpart in *Pharro*.²⁸⁹

Phase three began with open Roman hostility against Parthia in 53 BCE. Using Syria as a springboard from which to invade and conquer the Parthian Empire

during his pro-consulship, Crassus invaded Iran. But he did not succeed since both he and his son were killed in a major battle at Carrhae. The Parthian commander, Surena, returned from Carrhae carrying Crassus's Roman eagles with him.²⁹⁰

The growing hostility between Rome and Parthia also sounded the death knell for Hellenism, which had flourished in the region since the time of Alexander. Throughout the Seleucid era and into the Roman Empire, Hellenism had been allowed to flourish in both the Seleucid domains and in the cities held by the Parthians. That process was now to be halted, and in its place the culture of Iran as it had been promoted under the Achaemenids was to be reestablished.

To implement the new policy, Vologeses II (148–192 CE) broke the truce with Rome and replaced the Greek language with Parthian Middle Persian. He also ordered that the *Avesta*, the sacred book of the Zoroastrians, especially the *Videvat* or *Vendidad* (defense against demons), be organized and codified.

The de-Hellenization process, of course, was not easy. It had taken Hellenism a long time to penetrate Iranian culture; it would take just as long to put a meaningful end to it. Due to a scarcity of communication, the rural areas of Iran had not been affected greatly. In the reforms of Vologeses II, therefore, the urban centers, especially those with overt affiliation with Seleucid and Roman sympathy, were targeted. In these centers, the use of the Greek language was banned and the phrase *philhellene* was dropped from the coinage. The statues of Greek gods, which by now had blended into the religious landscape of ancient Parthia, were toppled and, once again, *Ahura Mazda*, *Mithra*, *Verethragna*, *Ashi*, and *Armaiti* were revered. This process gradually weakened Rome's strong cultural influence on Iran and restored Zoroastrianism its prestige as the sole religion of the land. To assure that Rome would honor Iran's wishes and stay at a safe distance, xenophobia was added to religious fervor. By the time that the Parthian power was eclipsed by Sassanid might, Hellenism had already been overtaken by Zoroastrianism.

At its zenith, the Parthian Empire consisted of Parthia proper, centered on Ctesiphon, as well as a number of domains over which it had direct jurisdiction. Parthian *satrap*s were sent to these regions to collect taxes and administer justice. Parthia also exerted influence over and provided security and support for a number of other kingdoms from which it received tribute.

The power of the king under the Parthians was much more limited than under the Achaemenids. As far as administration is concerned, the king followed the traditional tribal law and ruled by consensus. Government consisted of two houses: Royal Council and Council of Elders. The former was populated by adult males of the royal house, the latter, by experienced male elders and religious personages of Parthian blood. Major decisions, such as the appointment of a new king, took place in the Supreme Council, in which select members from both Royal Council and Council of Elders participated.

Membership in the Supreme Council was a Parthian right and the royal house had very little influence on most of those making the decisions. The king had to satisfy three requirements for kingship: Parthian blood; competence in rulership, administration, and soldiery; and being the elder son of the reigning king. If these

three requirements were not met, the Supreme Council would consider other eligible individuals close to the crown, going down the line, if circumstances required, as far as the king's uncles. After a king was appointed, however, the situation changed. The all-powerful king, in order to secure his position, usually eliminated those council members who had either voted against his election as king or who disagreed with his policies as king.

The degree of power invested in the nobles as a class at this time was also unprecedented in Iranian history. The nobles could dismiss a king or replace him with a king of their choice. They could do so because the king's military was superior to each individual *satrap's* army but insignificant compared to the power of the combined forces of the *satrapies*. Indeed, the great wars that the Parthians fought against Rome during the second phase of their rule were fought by the contingents contributed by the nobility. The powerful house of Suren, for instance, must have played a role reminiscent of the legendary houses of Sam and Viseh in Firdowsi's *Shahname*.

The Parthians continued the Achaemenid practice of next-of-kin marriages (cf., Cambyses II married one of his own sisters), as well as many of the other Achaemenid traditions and traits. They treated their captives with respect and remained faithful to their own word. Although to a lesser degree than for the Sassanids, Zoroastrianism played a unifying role—the very role that the Seleucids had hoped deification of their emperors would play for them.

THE SASSANIDS

The Sassanids, coming from the Pars province, considered themselves the true Persian inheritors of the mantle of the Achaemenids. This was as opposed to the Parthians who rose from the areas east of the Caspian Sea and who, for a good part of their rule, were supporters of Hellenism.²⁹¹ There was, however, a main difference between the Achaemenids and the Sassanids in that the Sassanids were not in control of the lands beyond Mesopotamia and that, during their era, a good part of the territories of the Achaemenids were in Roman hands.²⁹²

The legends that establish the identity of the eponymous ancestor who founded the Sassanid Empire, Sassan, have one thing in common: they confirm that the Empire's rise to power, in spite of its inherent difficulties, was successful. Many legends explain the circumstances of the rise of Ardashir to power. We shall begin this chapter with three of those legends.²⁹³

One tradition relates that Sassan was a prince of the Pars Province and a vassal of Gochihr, chief petty king of Persis, whose daughter he married. In 208 CE, Papak, Sassan's son from Gochihr's daughter, overthrew his grandfather, Gochihr, and proclaimed himself the ruler of Persis. Papak's son, Ardashir, then established the Sassanid dynasty. Another tradition relates that Sassan was one of king Papak's shepherds. When Papak dreamed that Sassan's son would become the future ruler of the world, he gave his daughter in marriage to Sassan. Ardashir, the founder of

the Sassanid Dynasty, was born of this marriage. A third tradition ascribes Sassan's motives for attaining kingship of the region to a quest for the rejuvenation of the ancient Achaemenid Empire and a great desire for the expansion of the Zoroastrian faith.²⁹⁴ This tradition introduces Sassan as a high dignitary and a *mu'bad* in charge of the *Anahid* temple of fire at Istakhr in the province of Pars. At the time, Sassan's son, Papak, governed a small kingdom on the Bakhtagan Lake. With the help of the king of Pars, a vassal of the Parthian king Ardavan V,²⁹⁵ Papak succeeded in making his younger son, Ardashir, the governor of Darabjird. Soon after that, Papak ousted the Parthian king's vassal and proclaimed himself the king of Pars. Ardavan V refused Papak recognition and, after Papak's death, continued his policy of withholding consent to Papak's elder son, Shapur.²⁹⁶ The situation became especially difficult when Shapur, too, was killed at Darabjird and was succeeded by his younger brother, Ardashir.²⁹⁷ The *Karnamak-i Ardashir-i Papakan* (the deeds of Ardashir Papakan) describes how Ardashir was helped by his *farr* (divine favor) and *khvarna* (kingly charisma) to gain the rulership of Iran.²⁹⁸

After defeating Ardavan's appointed governor for Pars and proclaiming himself king, Ardashir forced the other princes of Pars into submission, united the province under religious (i.e., Zoroastrian) rule, and extended his suzerainty over Isfahan and Kerman.

To defend Ctesiphon from being captured by Ardashir, Ardavan V commissioned the King of Ahwaz to kill Ardashir, but the King of Ahwaz could not defeat Ardashir. Instead, Ardashir marched on Ctesiphon and, in the course of three battles, overthrew Ardavan V.²⁹⁹ The elimination of Ardavan V (224 CE), as we shall see, was the first in a series of battles during which Ardashir, over a period of two years, consolidated his hold on Iran.

Ardashir I

(r. 224–241 CE)

Ardashir I, the founder of the Sassanid Dynasty and of the Sassanid Empire, ruled for seventeen years. This includes fifteen years as king after he was crowned in 226 CE. In Iranian history, the death of the ruler was always accompanied by chaos within the realm, along with intrigue and possible incursions into the land from the outside. The immediate threat to Ardashir's power was from Kerman, Isfahan, and Khuzistan. He fought the rulers of those regions and defeated them.³⁰⁰

The growing power of Ardashir alarmed Ardavan V who, with a huge army, met Ardashir at a place called Hormuzdgan. In the battle that followed, Ardavan V was killed and, in 226, Ctesiphon fell into the hands of Ardashir I.³⁰¹ While most of the rebellious regions accepted the rulership of Ardashir, Armenia did not. Intent on capturing Armenia, Ardashir I crossed the Euphrates, captured Nisibis and Harran, killed the king of Armenia, and included Armenia in his empire.³⁰²

Ardashir I then extended his empire from the Euphrates River in the west to Merv, Herat, and Sistan in the east. Like Mithradates I of the Parthian Dynasty, Ardashir forged a strong army under the close supervision of his son and crown

prince Shapur and unified the faith. This latter accomplishment was managed with the aid of Tansar, a chief *herbad*, who convinced many of the supporters of the former Parthian rulers to rally around Ardashir I.

Among Ardashir's deeds are the expansion of the Iranian frontiers in all directions and the reduction of the power of the local kings, which he accomplished by centralizing the government. Furthermore, he replaced the liberal Seleucid and Parthian practices with his own imperial brand of forced conformity.³⁰³ His doctrine of the inseparability of state and religion guided Iran for four centuries under his successors and has since influenced the political and religious thought in Iran.

The Letter of Tansar

A 3rd century document (revived in the 6th century), the Letter confirms the unity of the Zoroastrian church and the Sassanid state: "For church and state were born of the one womb, joined together and never to be sundered."¹ The letter is written originally to King Gushnasp of Tabaristan by the high priest of Ardashir I. It addresses charges leveled against his king (cf., "Denkard," Book IV).²

The document was translated by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (9th century) into Arabic, by Ibn Isfandiari (13th century) into Persian, and by James Darmesteter (1894) into French.³ The Persian translation is the one that has survived.

1 Boyce, 1968, p. 12.

2 Adhami, 2003, p. 226f.

3 Darmesteter, 1884, pp. 185–250.

In order to create a new order on the basis of the teachings of Zoroaster, he recognized Zoroastrianism as the official religion and the Magi as the official religious body of Iran. He ordered sacred fires to be rekindled in the temples of fire and, with the help of Tansar, he diligently continued the efforts of the Parthian kings, especially Vologeses II (around 148–192 CE), to codify and standardize the *Avesta*. His motives in this regard stemmed as much from a religious belief in the supremacy of good over evil as from a societal need. Under the Parthians, Iranian nationals had been loosely united. Ardashir I, using the power of the Zoroastrian faith, intended to concentrate the energies of all Iranians, from the Indus to the Syrian desert, on one single issue: the divine order sanctioned by *Ahura Mazda*.

Ardashir I regarded the Parthians as usurpers to the throne of Iran, and he did everything in his power to discredit the Parthian rulers and destine them for oblivion. His systematic campaigns to discredit his predecessors included defacing monuments, remodeling buildings, destroying literature, and distorting history. As mentioned, under Ardashir I even the number of years during which the Parthians held sway over Iran was reduced by two hundred years in order to postpone the predetermined end of the world predicted by Zoroaster.

Ardashir was concerned with the security of his kingdom. In this regard, he resurrected the Immortals, divided the population into various categories, and assigned overseers for each category. Realizing that security and prosperity went hand in hand, he constructed a number of new cities and rebuilt many of the old.

To improve agriculture, he had a number of canals dug, and to improve commerce, he saw to the building of roads and bridges. Finally, to improve public relations, he reduced all fines. Even the cutting of hands as punishment was prohibited.

ZOROASTRIAN COSMOLOGY AGAIN

Recall that Zoroaster reorganized the Mazdian *Spentas* into a group of six *Amesha Spentas* and assigned them *Yazatas* and *Fravashis*.³⁰⁴ After centuries, when Zoroastrianism had undergone the ravages of Alexander's invasion and the imposition of Greek and Roman values on its gods by the Seleucids, following the Parthians, the Sassanids reestablished the faith as the official religion of their domain and revived the study and practice of its principles and beliefs.³⁰⁵ This education was no longer in the Avestan language, the original language of Zoroastrianism, but in Pahlavi Middle Persian. Therefore, the names of *Abura Mazda*, the *Spentas*, the *Yazatas*, and the *Fravashis* were reproduced in Pahlavi Middle Persian. The content of the cosmology remained nearly the same.³⁰⁶ The influence of Zurvan, of course, could not be ignored.³⁰⁷

In the revived cosmology, *Uhrmazd* rules his kingdom through his six manifestations known as the *Ameshaspands*.³⁰⁸ Each *Spand* takes care of a certain number of human needs. The *Spands* communicate with the faithful through the *Ahuric Order*, which comprises the following hierarchy. The *Spands* form a pantheon directly below *Uhrmazd*, their chief.³⁰⁹ Below them are the *Izads* (archangels) and below them are the *Fraward* (guardian angels). The human beings (cf., thought beings in Mazdian cosmology), ruled by *Uhrmazd*, are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. According to this system, when an individual prays, the prayer is picked up by his or her *Fraward*, who communicates it to an appropriate *Izad*. The *Izad* takes the prayer to an appropriate *Spand*. Through the intermediacy of that *Spand*, *Uhrmazd* hears the individual's prayer in his soul and reacts to it. The same is true when an individual makes a wish. The number of *Spands* is six, that of the *Izads* is finite but unknown, and the number of the *Fraward* is the same as the number of the faithful inhabiting the globe at a given time. See the sidebar on the *Ahuric Order* below.

The Ameshaspands

The *Bundahishn* (book of creation) describes the creation of the *Ameshaspands* in great detail.³¹⁰ Here, for the sake of brevity, we shall look at the background of each *Spand* and outline his or her function.

- 1) *Wahman* is one of the lower deities in the Zoroastrian pantheon of gods. *Wahman* essentially combines innate intellectual capacity with learning capability. He offers his acquired wisdom to mankind for the improvement of his soul and mind.³¹¹ *Wahman* is represented by the animal kingdom in this world. He is an angel who, as the embodiment of wisdom, calms anger. Zoroastrian astrology and medicine, as well as the sanity of the community, depended on the actions of this angel.³¹²

- 2) *Ashawahisht* symbolizes truth and righteousness, as well as embraces the unchanging aim of creation.³¹³ *Ashawahisht* guides the world away from evil

and directs it towards the truth. He is the guardian of the fires and the mountains.³¹⁴

3) *Shahrewar* influences the outcome of the cosmic battle between good and evil. It benefits the entire creation of *Uhrmazd*. He is the angel in charge of metals.³¹⁵

4) *Spandarmad* embodies the divine qualities of love and devotion, as well as the social welfare of humanity, animals, and plants. The planet earth represents *Spandarmad* in this world.³¹⁶

5) *Khurdad* reflects the mental and physical well being of the individual. Water represents *Khurdad* in this world.³¹⁷

6) *Amurdat* personifies the destination of those who have vanquished evil. Plants represent *Amurdat* in this world.³¹⁸

The Izads

The *Izads* are the Zoroastrian version of the Mazdian *Yazatas*. In the following, we will discuss the background and development of the *Izads*.³¹⁹

The Celestial Izads

These are the agents of *Uhrmazd* who guide the thought processes of the faithful so that they do not falter. Their ranks include:

A) Divine Wisdom comprising *Din*, *Chisti*, *S(a)rosh*

1) *Din* (female divinity of Religion) is one of the least personified of the *izads*. She has a *yasht* assigned to her name. She is the genius of the Holy Law of *Uhrmazd*.

2) *Chisti* (female Divinity of Religious Wisdom), Personified epithets: good, upright. The *Izad* most desired by Zarathustra. Zarathustra implores *Chisti* for clear vision. It is through the deeds of *Chisti* that the faithful hope to approach *Uhrmazd*.

3) *S(a)rosh* (*Uhrmazd's* Messenger). *S(a)rosh* returned victorious from battle with the demons. His dwelling has 1000 pillars. He is self-gifted from within and star-spangled from without. *Uhrmazd* taught him his doctrine so that he might go and teach the world (cf., *Osiris* in Egyptian cosmology).

B) Rectitude comprising *Mehr*, *Rashn*, *Ashtad*, *Erethe*, *Resanstat*

1) *Mehr* (genius of the Sun)

Mehr is the greatest of the *Izads*. His *yasht* is ten times longer than the one to *Uhrmazd*. He is the strongest, sturdiest, and the most active of the *Izads*. He is the guardian of contracts and war. From pre-Zoroastrian times, there has been a hint about a union between the kingdoms of *Mehr* and *Uhrmazd*.

2) *Rashn* (Personification of Truth)

Rashn's epithet is the most upright. *Rashn* is the most knowing, discerning, far-seeing, and helpful. He is the greatest smiter of thieves and bandits. He has a *yasht* consecrated to him. He presides over the Ordeal Court.

3) *Ashtad* (female genius of Truth)

Ashtad cooperates with *Mehr*, *S(a)rosh*, and *Rashn*. She is the genius of equity and increase in world resources.

4) *Erethe* and *Resanstat* (minor female divinities of Truth)

The standing epithet for *Erethe* and *Resanstat* is Good.

C) *Varahran* (angel of Victory)

Varahran is one of the most popular divinities of the ancient Iranians. He is the patron angel of Iranian lands. He is invoked by armies that meet in battle. *Varahran* changes form according to circumstances, thus adding the concept of metamorphosis to Iranian religion.³²⁰

D) *Raman* (genius of Joy in Life)

The joy that *Raman* grants is not spiritual. It belongs to this life. His gift appears in the form of a rich harvest, fertile fields, wide pastures, abundant fodder, and thick foliage. He works in close association with the terrestrial *Vata* (wind).

E) *Rata* (genius of Charity)

Rata oversees charity, grace, and alms-giving. *Uhrmazd* rewards the devout through *Rata*. The faithful hope to reach *Uhrmazd* through *Rata*.

F) *Ashtih* (Angel of Peace)

She is invoked in company with *Wahman*.

The number of the *Izads* is in the hundreds of thousands. Yet they all have the same function, i.e., to help the faithful perform their worldly and religious duties.

The Terrestrial *Izads*

These are the agents of *Uhrmazd* who regulate the affairs of the world so that no harm will be inflicted on the faithful.

Light

Many *Izads* appear under this general function. The most prominent is *Khwar*, or the genius of the Sun deified. The 6th *yasht* and the 1st *niyayesh* are dedicated to him. His standing epithets are imperishable, radiant, and swift-horsed. The rising of the sun, which brings purification to the earth, is glorified by hundreds and thousands of minor *Izads*, who distribute the rays of the sun upon the earth.

The next major member is *Mah*, or the Moon personified. He is looked at and referred to as the possessor of the seed of the Bull. He is also described as possessor of water, warmth, knowledge, and healing.

Wind

Vata is the wind deified. Wind has two aspects: Good and Evil. That is because wind can be productive and destructive at the same time. Both the benevolent spirit and evil spirit create *Vata*. The devotees sacrifice to the beneficial aspect of *Vata*. *Vata's* standing epithet is "Standing on High." *Vata* strikes terror among all, and fearlessly enters the deepest and the darkest places to smite demons. *Vata* is described as high-girt, of strong stature, of high foot, of wide breast, of broad thighs, and of powerful eyes. *Vata* wears a golden crown and a golden necklace.

Fire

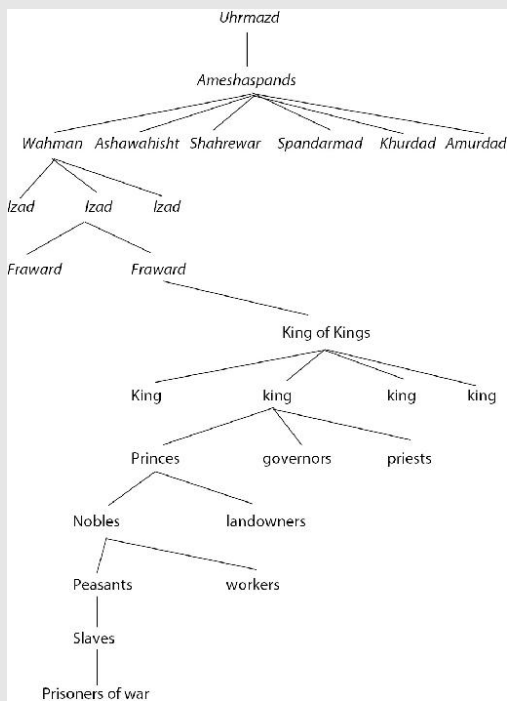
The genius of the fire is *Adar*. Many times in the *Avesta*, fire is called the son of *Uhrmazd*. The devotees ascend to *Uhrmazd* through *Adar*. *Adar* thus is the guiding *Izad* of the devout. *Adar* accompanies *Mehr*, alongside his golden chariot, to show him the way. *Adar* should not be defiled by the dead. No corpses should be brought near the fire of *Uhrmazd*.

Water

Ardwisur-Anahid is the goddess of the waters. Her standing epithet is *Undeiled*. She is one of the few deities mentioned in the inscriptions of the Achaemenids. *Ardwisur-Anahid* is celebrated in one of the longer *yashts* and in the 65th chapter of the *yasna*.

The *Aburic* Order

Named after *Abura Mazda*, the Mazdian namesake of *Uhrmazd*, the *Aburic* Order is a system of values based on the concept of the *farr*. It consists of two consecutive hierarchies: celestial and terrestrial. The celestial hierarchy consists of *Uhrmazd*, the chief deity, supervising six *Ameshaspands* that, in turn, supervise a host of *Izads*. *Frawards*, the number of which equals the number of the faithful at a given time, relate the mortals to the divine. The terrestrial hierarchy corresponds to the celestial in that the *farr* of the King of Kings is the strongest. Kings and *satraps*, magnates, workers, serfs, slaves, and prisoners of war, whose amount of *farr* decreases as we travel down the hierarchy, support him. The divine and the social levels of the *Aburic* Order are displayed in the following chart:



Earth

The angel *Zam* or *Zamyat* derives its name from the Avestan word for earth, *zam* (cf., Mod. Per. *Zamin*; Russ. *Zemliya*). The functions of *Zam* and *Spandarmad* overlap.

The Fraward

These are the souls of the living. There are as many *Frawards* at a given time as there are faithful individuals on earth. When the individual dies, his *Fraward* enters the nether regions.

Shapur I

(r. 241–272 CE)

Shapur I was named heir to the throne officially by his father, Ardashir I, and later shared rulership with him. This is attested to by the coinage of the time, which carries the faces of both father and son.³²¹ At an early age, therefore, Shapur was already familiar with the administrative skills required of a monarch. After the death of his father, he proclaimed himself “King of Kings of Iran and Exterior Iran” and ruled for 31 years. In a Relief at *Naqsh-e Rostam*, he calls himself: “the Mazdayasnian, the God Shapur, King of Kings of the Aryans, Iranians, and non-Aryans, of divine descent, son of the Mazdayasnian, the god Ardashir, King of Kings of the Aryans, grandson of the god-King Papak.”

A warrior king, Shapur I was extremely proud of his prowess, as is evident from the following edict in which he brags of the strength of his arm:

This is I, the Mazdian lord Shapur, King of Kings of Iran and exterior Iran, of divine lineage, son of the Mazdian lord Ardashir, King of Kings of Iran, of divine lineage; and grandson of Papak, the king; and I shot this arrow in front of the *satraps*, the princes, the nobles, and the people of title, when I had my foot on this cleft. The arrow I shot fell beyond the [designated] pile. [It fell] to a place where even if there was a pile it would not be visible from the outside [i.e., from where the person shooting the arrow stands]. Then I ordered a new pile built [where my arrow landed]. Let whoever has a good arm, put his foot on this cleft and shoot toward that [new] pile. Whoever throws his arrow there has a good arm.³²²

By the time of Shapur I, the Kushan Empire, under Kanishka, had become rich through trade and, allied with Rome, posed a constant threat to Iran.³²³ Drawing on his experience as the *satrap* of the Kushan lands, Shapur I continued the efforts of his father in consolidating the territories captured by his father, expanding the Empire, especially to the east, and centralizing the administration. During his rule, Iran was extended to the east to include the lands occupied by the Kushans. According to his inscription at *Naqsh-e Rostam*, the cities of Peshawar (in present-day Pakistan), Bactra, Samarqand, and Chach (present-day Tashkent, Uzbekistan) became tributary to Persia, leaving only a fraction of the Kushan Empire untouched.³²⁴

Shapur I and Valerianus

In five large friezes, the most well known being those at Bishapur and *Naqsh-e Rostam*, as well as in many smaller depictions, Shapur advertised his victory over Valerianus. One depiction on jade shows Valerianus¹ and Shapur I engaged in single combat. Valerianus tries to strike Shapur I with his sword. The Persian monarch disables him by twisting his wrist and pulling him down. This arm-twisting motif becomes the main feature of subsequent depictions of this single combat between the two rulers.²

1 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 294.

2 See also Soudavar, p. 14, for further discussion.

To the west, capitalizing on instability in Rome, Shapur I invaded Armenia and, on his way, captured Syria and Antioch as well. In Rome, the situation improved. Gordian III (238–244 CE) not only repulsed the Iranian army and recaptured the major fortresses of Nisibis and Carrhae but also put the capital city of Ctesiphon under siege. At the same time, mutinous Roman soldiers murdered Gordian III and Philip the Arab (244–249 CE) became the Roman emperor. Shapur I and Philip the Arab negotiated a peace treaty that recognized Mesopotamia and Armenia as Iranian territory.

The same episode is repeated in 260 CE. Shapur I subjugated Armenia and advanced on Syria and Antioch. Emperor Valerianus confronted Shapur I but was defeated near Edessa. Shapur I not only kept the Roman Emperor a prisoner for

the rest of his life, but also humiliated him by having him kneel before his horse every time he mounted it.

In Rome, Shapur I installed his own emperor, Cyriadis, and bestowed upon him the title of Caesar. In Iran, in various small communities, he settled some 70,000 Roman legionnaires that he brought back with him as prisoners of war. He employed many of these prisoners—architects, engineers, and technicians—on public works projects. They built agricultural complexes that added to the prosperity of the Khuzistan province. For instance, the Shushtar (now Band-i Qaysar) dam brought a great deal of prosperity to the newly-built city of Gundishapur. The prisoners also built roads and bridges.³²⁵

As mentioned, Ardashir I reinstituted the Zoroastrian religion and forced its precepts on the people. And, as explained, by the time of Shapur I, Ardashir's reforms had resulted in an opulent church, a wealthy nobility, and a large body of exploited peasants and serfs. Analyzing the bases of his support, Shapur I knew that since there was no limit to the greed of the nobility, sooner or later, their oppression would incite the people against him. Seizing that opportunity, the nobles would then usurp the throne. Furthermore, he knew that at that juncture the clergy, too, would ally themselves with the nobility. For this reason, Shapur I became personally involved in the country's religious affairs as much as he was involved in its military matters. In his search for a faith that would curb the authority of the influential Zoroastrian clergy—in particular, Kartir—Shapur I commissioned translations of numerous Greek and Indian works on medicine, astronomy, and philosophy into Middle Persian.³²⁶ He became acquainted with the savants of his time, among them the Prophet Mani. He showed favor to Mani, the founder of Manicheism.³²⁷ Hoping to build a class of priests loyal to the crown, he allied himself with the Prophet and allowed him to promote Manicheism in Iran.³²⁸ Was Manicheism the answer?

Mani was born in Babylon in the 3rd century CE of Iranian parents. He was the founder of Manicheism, an ancient Gnostic religion. Mani was a highly gifted child who inherited his father's mystical qualities. Early in his life he is known to have had communications with the supernatural. According to al-Biruni, Mani received a revelation from a spirit called Syzygos, or Twin, that taught him the truths of religion. Influenced by Mazdaism, he started preaching at a young age.

Mani's first religious trip was to the Kushan Empire in northwestern India. He is said to have converted a Buddhist king to his religion. Whether this conversion in the Indus Valley took place is uncertain. What is certain is that many Buddhist concepts penetrated his ideas for Manicheism, a synthetic religion that took shape during this period.

Mani's religion did not catch on with the next generation and wasn't liked by the Zoroastrian clergy. His ideas only lasted until the death of Shapur I. It is said that Mani died in prison awaiting execution by the Persian Emperor Bahram I. It is thought that much effort was used to include parts of every religion into Manicheism. As a result, many Christian works have been saved that would have otherwise been lost. Christians dismissed Mani as a heretic.

As mentioned, Mani's esteem at the court lasted only as long as Shapur I lived. Upon Shapur I's death, Hormuzd I, his successor, retained Mani at his court and kept him in high esteem. Hormuzd I's reign, however, lasted for only about one year. Bahram I, who succeeded Hormuzd I, disdained Mani, especially the Manichean philosophy that he taught, which Hormuzd I thought was anti-Zoroastrian. He arranged for the prophet to defend his beliefs against Kartir, a staunch promoter of Zoroastrian orthodoxy. Mani lost both the debate and his status at court. Though he was executed, Mani's faith survived for centuries, gaining disciples in lands as distant as China.

Under the next two monarchs, Bahram II and Bahram III, the Sassanid Dynasty witnessed its first decline. Under Bahram II, who ruled for eighteen years, Byzantine power reached a degree that it threatened the capital city of Ctesiphon. Were it not for the sudden death of Emperor Karus, who died in the vicinity of Ctesiphon, the capital would have fallen into Byzantine hands. Bahram III ruled for only four months, leaving the throne to Narseh, the son of Shapur I.³²⁹

MANICHEISM

Manicheism, a dualistic faith, synthesized the Judeo-Christian traditions with Gnosticism, Buddhism, and orthodox Zoroastrianism. Mani, a Babylonian with an obscure past, preached that, like the rest of creation, humanity may contain something of the divine. It is each individual's duty to extract that spark of goodness and set it free.

Good and evil, however, were not balanced in an individual. Neither, according to Mani, did everyone necessarily possess a spark of goodness. This degree of possible goodness in the individual, then, created a hierarchy among the adherents whereby only some could look forward to tranquility in the abode of light after death. Others would be abandoned in darkness.³³⁰

The lowest degree in Mani's hierarchy was assigned to the wicked, with the hearers or combatants just above them. These were allowed many amenities of life, as they received relatively little or none of the blessings of the afterlife. They were allowed, for instance, to marry, drink wine, eat flesh, and procreate. The teachers (also called elders), who occupied the highest rank, on the other hand, could neither marry nor acquire property. Individual elders were hierarchically categorized, from the representative of the prophet to the level of the hearers. The latter were hierarchically categorized from the lowest level of the elders to the level of the wicked.

In the afterlife, the souls of the elect (i.e., teachers or elders) would be ushered directly to "the pillar of glory." From there, they would ascend to the abode of light by way of the moon. The souls of the hearers would join the elect after they passed through a long process of purification and wandering. The souls of the wicked, however, would remain in this world in hopeless misery until the final conflagration, after which they would be consigned to the realm of darkness

forever.

As can be seen, Manicheism has much in common with Buddhism, although the extent of Mani's knowledge of the Buddha's teachings is not known. Indeed, after Mani's death and the subsequent spread of Manicheism into the Far East, attempts were made to recognize Mani as a reincarnation of the Buddha. Similarly, Manicheism has close ties to Christianity. As is well known, St. Augustine became a Manichean for several years before he returned to Christianity. 331

Moreover, Manicheism shared certain tenets with orthodox Zoroastrianism. Manichean eschatology, for instance, is similar to that of orthodox Zoroastrianism. Nonetheless, the differences between the two faiths outshine the similarities by far. Mani's evaluation of the material world was the exact opposite of Zoroaster's. For instance, Zoroaster taught that one must earn a living through daily labor, marry, and have many children. In this way, the Prophet believed, warriors could be produced to fight on the side of the good and bring about the triumph of *Abura Mazda* over *Angra Mainyu* (the lord of evil). At its core, this view is founded on the premise that the material world is basically blessed and that it can be enhanced at the expense of the kingdom of evil. Mani, on the other hand, preached that one's material body, like the rest of the material creation, is basically evil.³³² The good in humanity, Mani said, is miserably overwhelmed by an evil force that thrives on marriage, procreation, and lust. To liberate good and enable it to triumph over evil, Mani taught celibacy and self-mortification. Thus, where orthodox Zoroastrianism taught that all souls would eventually be saved, some after suffering hardship, Manicheism taught that all souls, except a select few, would be destined to suffer a miserable existence on earth. In this way, he preached, the blessed elements of the body—water, fire, and breeze—would be extracted by the sun, the moon, and the shining gods so they may be sent to heaven; the rest, inherently dark and evil, would be automatically discarded and destined for hell. It was this aspect of Mani's religion that distinguished humanity from wealth, arrogance, and power that appealed to Shapur I.

However, reforms that fail to enjoy a consensus during their implementation are usually good as long as their main supporters hold sway. Their long-term success depends on the strength of the minority that truly believes in them. Mani's case is a good example. Having allowed the use of his holy mission for the promotion of a secular end (i.e., restraining the power of the nobility and the clergy), Mani had lost the favor of his real disciples. At the court, too, he had lost much of his support. Not wishing to continue the policies of Shapur I and Hormuzd I, Bahram I had Mani executed, posting Mani's skin, filled with straw, at the gate to welcome visitors to the city of Gundishapur. Although Mani's life was lost in the struggle for power, his message for humanity survived, influencing both Zoroastrianism and Christianity.

Manicheism somewhat marred the untainted spirit that the Zoroastrian scriptures had inculcated in the simple tillers of the land. Until the advent of Mani, the Zoroastrians felt that all efforts expended aided the kingdom of good. Rather than the uncontested domain of good thoughts, deeds, and words, suddenly a grim

and evil world was emerging—one in which the lie played the prominent role.³³³ Peering through the darkness of which Mani spoke, only sparks of goodness twinkled in the depths. Before this, they realized, they had been poor economically, but Mani made them feel poor spiritually as well. Why should their king, the epitome of justice on earth, enslave them as evil enslaves light? Ironically, they were asking the very tough questions that Shapur I had hoped Mani's message would suppress. Instead of helping Shapur I, Mani thus sharpened the focus on the prevalence of corruption at the top of the Sassanid power structure and illuminated the vulnerability of the individuals at the bottom. Mani shook the pillars of the divine right to rulership.

An alternative to Manicheism that Shapur I might have entertained is Zurvanism. Knowledge about this religion is scant. At one level it is identified as a rival of Mazdian Zoroastrianism, at another it is regarded as a cosmic force rivaling "thought" as the source for all creation. We shall discuss Zurvanism later, in the context of the fall of the Empire.³³⁴

The Goddess *Anahid*

The goddess *Anahid* is the source of the waters of the world. She is the cause of the increase in life, cattle, and prosperity in *Aryana Vaeja*.

Around the end of the 2nd century after the birth of Christ, the temple of *Anahid* at Estakhr was in the custodianship of Sassan, a hunter and a warrior. Sassan's son, Papak, killed the king of Estakhr and seized the throne. A rock carving shows Papak at worship before a fire altar. He wears a crown and holds a scepter. This indicates that Papak was also the priest of the cult. Papak's son, Shapur, on horseback, is close by him.³³⁵

Shapur I was one of the major supporters of the cult of *Anahid*. At Bishapur, he built many monuments, including a temple dedicated to the goddess *Anahid*. The remains of the temple are at fifteen miles distance from the town of Kazerun, where the cave holding the gigantic statue of Shapur I is located. There is also a rock carving at *Naqsh-i Rostam* in which Narseh (293–302 CE), the son of Shapur I, receives the *farr* from the hands of *Anahid*. She wears a serrated crown and a sleeveless cloak.

At *Taq-i Bustan*, near Kermanshah, there is a grotto in which Khosrau II is invested with the *farr*. In an elaborate relief, King Khosrau II is depicted in his royal robes on horseback, as is the norm, and in the presence of the deity. As a warrior king, he is attired for combat. Khosrau II receives crowns from both *Uhrmazd* and *Anahid*. The goddess wears a crown similar to that of *Uhrmazd* and, in her left hand, holds a pitcher of flowing water.

Anahid was worshiped at natural sanctuaries scattered throughout Iran. There are some shrines in Iran that could have been traced to the goddess if they had not been Islamized at an early time. One such shrine is near the city of Rayy. It is called "the Lady of the Land" or "Shahrbanu." Even today it attracts Muslim pilgrims. Bibi Shahrbanu was a daughter of the last Sassanid king, Yazdegerd III, and the widow of al-Hussein (third Shi'ite *imam*), son of *Imam Ali*, the first Shi'ite Saint.

After the Arab invasion, when fleeing, Shahrbanu reached this spring. The mountain opened up and gave her sanctuary. A similar shrine in Yazd, called Banu-Pars, “the Lady of Persia,” could have originally been associated with *Anahid*. The shrine is built at the confluence of water-courses beside a living spring.

The Greek form of *Anahid* is *Anahitis*. *Anahitis* appears on Roman coins but, unlike *Mithras*, no mystery cult is associated with her.

Narseh

(r. 293–302 CE)

After Bahram II, who ruled for eighteen years and during whose rule Roman armies advanced as far as Ctesiphon, as well as after the reign of Bahram III, who ruled for four months, the rulership of Iran was passed on to Narseh, a son of Shapur I and governor of Sistan, Baluchistan, and Sindh. He eliminated his own brother, Hurmuzd, to assure a tranquil kingdom for himself. But with Roman intrigue in Armenia, that was not possible. Armenia had been included in the Iranian domains by force by Ardashir I.

In view of the humiliating stance of the Iranians vis-à-vis Emperor Valerianus, Diocletian supported Tiridates III to revolt against Narseh. Narseh defeated Tiridates III and forced him to flee to Rome (296 CE). Diocletian then sent Galerius, his own son-in-law, to Mesopotamia to defeat Narseh, but in the course of three battles, Narseh defeated Galerius. Diocletian then took matters into his own hands and with 25,000 men, invaded Armenia. In the battle that ensued, Narseh was defeated. In his hurry to leave the scene, Narseh left his wife, sisters, and some of his children behind.³³⁶

Narseh's defeat cost Iran dearly. Armenia and Eastern Mesopotamia were ceded to Rome. Narseh was also forced to make the following concessions: cede five provinces beyond the Tigris River; allow an extension of Armenian territories up to the fortress of Zintha, and relinquish all rights over Iberia. The only thing Narseh won was the establishment of Nisibis as the venue for Persian/Roman trade and negotiations.

Narseh abdicated in 301 CE in favor of his son Hormuzd II, who ruled for seven years. The event of his rule that resulted in his death was an incursion into Arab lands through Bahrain to end Arab intrigue in southern Iran. He was killed. His son Adarnarseh ruled for about a year before he was killed. Since upon Adarnaseh's death, there were no male members who qualified, his unborn son was crowned king.

Shapur II

(lived and ruled 309–379 CE)

The consolidation of the empire under Ardashir I and Shapur I contributed immensely to the survival and continuation of the Sassanid line during the reigns of the weaker kings who followed, especially Bahram II and Narseh. Without that solid base, the empire would not have endured to be rescued by Shapur II.

Shapur II reigned for seventy years. His investiture scene depicts him standing on Emperor Julian's head while *Ahura Mazda*, standing on Julian's feet, hands him the symbol of leadership. *Mithra*, standing on a lotus flower, symbol of *Apam-Napat*, witnesses the contract. This is reminiscent of the Achaemenid triad of gods explained earlier.³³⁷ During the early years of this monarch's rule—Shapur II was pronounced king when he was still in his mother's womb—the Kushans reestablished their kingdom in the east, on both sides of the Hindu Kush. Following the example of the first Sassanids, Shapur II, after he became officially king at the age of sixteen, spent five years campaigning in the east until almost all the Kushan lands were placed under Iranian overlordship.

Shapur II also dealt harshly with the Arabs who, crossing the Persian Gulf from Bahrain, moved into Iranian lands and proceeded as far as Ardashir-Khora in Pars. Shapur II captured Bahrain and defeated the Arab coalition of tribes at Najd. He moved these restive populations to Iran and settled them in Kerman and Hormuzd-Ardashir. The punishment that the Arabs who participated in these battles received was extraordinary. Shapur II had the shoulders of the prisoners pierced. Then a rope was run through the shoulders of the prisoners marching from Arabia to Persia. For this action, the Arabs called Shapur II *dhulaktaf* (the one who pierces, or is owner of shoulders).³³⁸ The term "owner of shoulders" can also be an attribute for someone with wide shoulders. Ironically, Shapur II had an imposing physique with wide shoulders.

Shapur II strengthened Zoroastrianism by ordering the codification of the books comprising the *Avesta*. Armenia resisted Zoroastrianism. In 303 CE, it had become a part of the Christian domains and, after 313 CE, when Constantine the Great (306–337 CE) adopted Christianity, it distanced itself from Iranian rule in a substantial way.³³⁹

The situation in Armenia placed Shapur II in a difficult position. He now could look forward to discord within his own borders, including revolts that stemmed from ethnic strife among Iranians instigated by the Hephthalites, as well as religious intrigue instigated by Rome, pitting the Manicheans, Christians, and Zoroastrians against each other. Often these disturbances shook the very foundation of the empire. In such situations, Shapur II acted decisively. For instance, he razed the ancient center of Susa to diminish the influence of Christian Rome in Zoroastrian Iran.³⁴⁰

Shapur II fought the Romans in three battles. When he failed in achieving victory in war, he gave the Iranian Christians an alternative. They had to either convert to Zoroastrianism or be executed. This policy gradually softened Rome's position. In 337 CE, Rome responded favorably to Shapur II's demands. Further progress into Roman territory brought the Romans to the negotiation table, and the death, in battle, of Emperor Julian, forced Rome to cede Armenia, as well as other western territories captured earlier from Iran (363 CE). Consequently, Armenia became an Iranian province.

During the latter part of Shapur II's reign, a major change occurred in the east, a change that affected the history of the east for centuries to come. As a result of

the formation of the Juan-juan confederacy,³⁴¹ the nomadic Hephthalites began to move out of Inner Asia. Around 371 CE, seeking new pastureland, they invaded the agricultural region of the upper Oxus and replaced the Kushans. Shapur II engaged the Hephthalites in battle, defeated them and, subsequently, used their power successfully against Rome. Although they dominated India, the center of Hephthalite power remained in Central Asia, in the vicinity of Balkh and Badakhshan. Shapur II built Nishapur, a great city later destroyed by the Mongols, in the vicinity of Balkh in Khurasan.

After Shapur II, Ardashir II, Shapur II's seventy-year old brother-in-law, ruled for nearly four years. During the latter part of Shapur II, Ardashir II had served as the governor of Adiabene. King Ardashir II was well known for his bad treatment of the Christians. He was deposed in 382 CE.

The reign of Shapur III, son of Shapur II, was also short. During his rule there were disturbances in Armenia which required Iranian interference. But rather than interference in Armenia, Shapur III opted for signing a peace treaty with Rome. Shapur III was murdered by his own troops in 388 CE.

Bahram IV, who followed Shapur III, ruled for about eleven years. Bahram IV continued the efforts of Shapur III in coming into an understanding with Rome on the Armenian question. Before his death, he signed a treaty with Rome as a result of which Armenia was divided into two parts: a Roman part governed by Constantinople and an Iranian part ruled from Ctesiphon.

Yazdegerd I

(r. 399 to 421 CE)

Yazdegerd I became king after the assassination of Bahram IV (399 CE). He ruled for twenty-one years. As far as the perennial wars between Persian monarchs and the rulers to their east and west are concerned, Yazdegerd I's rule was quite uneventful. Neither the Hephthalites nor the Romans (western or eastern) sought to fight him. In fact, initially he had very cordial relations with Christians to the point of punishing the Magi who maltreated Christians. However, an incident in which Christians burnt a temple of fire in Ctesiphon changed the king's attitude.³⁴² He began to systematically kill Christians and ordered all their churches to be burned throughout the land.³⁴³ He even attempted to convert the Christians in Armenia to the Zoroastrian faith.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the kings who followed Shapur II, the Kushans became strong and, by the time of Yazdegerd I, formed a powerful empire in the east.³⁴⁴

Upon Yazdegerd's death there was rivalry between two of his sons: Bahram and Shapur. A contest arranged by the nobles and the priests resolved the problem. Bahram won the contest and as Bahram V became the successor of Yazdegerd I.

Bahram V (Gur)

(r. 421–438 CE)

Bahram V was the son of Yazdegerd I. Helped by the Arabs of al-Hira, among whom he had grown up, he ascended the throne after the death of his father. The involvement of Arabs in Iranian affairs set a precedent, especially in Iran's relations with the Hephthalites.³⁴⁵ His rule began with Byzantine incursions into Armenia. In 422 CE, he repulsed the Byzantine incursion and, against Armenians' desire, annexed Armenia to Persia (428 CE). Under Bahram V, many Christians fled to Byzantium. Bahram V solved the Armenian problem by making the Christian church of Iran independent.

In the past, Persian monarchs had worried only about their western borders. By the time of Bahram V, the Hephthalites on the eastern front had become powerful enough to pose a threat. In fact, while Bahram V was dealing with Byzantium and Armenia, the Hephthalites occupied northeastern Iran and ravaged Khurasan and Rayy. Bahram confronted them with force, killed their Khaqan, and took the Khaqan's family hostage. His firm stand against the Hephthalites brought a degree of tranquility to Iran.

Many legends have come into being around the life and adventures of Bahram V.³⁴⁶ They span not only ancient times but also Islamic times.

Yazdegerd II

(r. 438–457 CE)

Yazdegerd II, son of Bahram V, spent the first eight years of his rule in battles with the Hephthalites in Eastern Iran. His efforts were not as successful as his father's, but he was able to secure Iranian borders to the east.

In the west, his main concern was Armenia, especially the expansion of Christianity in Armenia. Initially, Yazdegerd II thought he could resolve the Armenian situation by convincing the Christians to give up their faith and follow the dictates of Zoroaster. But, rather than complying, the Armenians, who had just devised their own writing system, increased their efforts against the Zoroastrian temples of fire. Consequently, Yazdegerd II invaded Armenia, defeated its king, and destroyed their places of worship. He then ordered temples of fire to be built throughout Armenia. He treated the Christians of Mesopotamia with the same severity as the Armenians when they revolted against his anti-Christian decrees. The Jews were treated very much the same way.³⁴⁷

At the end of his rule, Yazdegerd II signed a treaty with Rome. The articles of the treaty were mostly the same as the peace treaty that had been discussed earlier, at the end of the reign of Bahram V. This is the beginning of the decline of Sassanid imperial ideology.³⁴⁸

Hurmuzd III, son of Yazdegerd II, ruled for two years in name only. Throughout the two years he fought his brother, Peroz, who, with the assistance of the Hephthalites, sought the throne. Meanwhile, Empress Dinak, their mother, ruled from Ctesiphon. In the conflict, Hurmuzd III lost the throne while Peroz was forced to cede the cities of Taliqan and Tirmidh to the Hephthalites.

Peroz

(r. 457–484 CE)

Although Bahram V had curbed the expansionist aspirations of the Hephthalites in the east by killing their Khaqan, the Hephthalites grew in strength. Subsequent upheavals in Iran encouraged the Hephthalites to seek dominance in the country. One such event was a seven-year drought that forced Peroz to use much of his funds on subsidizing corn and other materials. Another was the rising power of the Christians (both Monophysite and Nestorian) and the Jews of Iran. The third was war with the Hephthalites, who intended to capitalize on those forces and dominate Iran. Peroz engaged the Hephthalites, but after his troops were lost in the desert in present-day Turkmenistan, he was defeated and taken hostage. Byzantium, needing to retain Iran as a buffer between herself and the Hephthalites, ransomed Peroz.³⁴⁹

Peroz's engagement in the east also prevented him from attending to the difficulties that Armenia created in the west. Fortunately for him, his able minister, Zarmihr, compensated and quelled that revolt.

In 484 CE, the Hephthalites killed Peroz, destroyed his cavalry and much of the Sassanid nobility, and took the king's family, including his son Kavadh, hostage.³⁵⁰

Belash

(r. 484–488 CE)

Upon the death of Peroz, his son Belash ascended the throne. Minister Zarmihr, who had settled the Armenian revolt, was instrumental in his ascension to the throne. From the start, Belash confronted two problems. His brother, Zarir, rose against him and claimed the throne. At the same time, the leader of Armenia requested that Christianity be recognized as the official religion of Armenia and that all the temples of fire in Armenia be destroyed. In order to show his good will, the Armenian leader pledged to help Belash defeat his brother. Belash stopped the forced conversion of the Christians and freed the Armenian Christians in their worship.

After Zarir was defeated, Belash turned his attention to the Hephthalites in the east. His treasury, however, did not have the funds needed to fight the Hephthalites. Zarmihr, once again, came to his rescue and provided the required funds. With the help of Zarmihr, Belash forced the Hephthalites to forego the regular tribute that Iran had to pay, as well as to release the Iranians who had been taken hostage following the death of Peroz. Kavadh, Peroz's son, was among the hostages. Within months of his release, Kavadh rose against Belash and, assisted by the Hephthalites, invaded Ctesiphon and claimed the throne.

Kavadh I

(r. 488–496 CE and 499–531 CE)

Kavadh I's forty-year reign was spread over two terms. Before he became king, Kavadh was a hostage of the Hephthalites for two years. During his captivity, he had learned much valuable military knowledge from the nomads, and during his stay with them, he established several connections, which greatly impacted his future life and rule.

After Peroz's death, the Hephthalites aided Kavadh in gaining the throne of Iran, which had been awarded to Kavadh's uncle, Belash. Kavadh's Iranian ally at the time was the feudal lord Zarmihr. Toward the end of Kavadh's first term, however, a conflict developed between Kavadh and Zarmihr with regard to the distribution of wealth in the kingdom. Kavadh felt that some of the wealth must filter down to the peasants who tilled the land and provided comfort for the upper echelon, but Zarmihr, who commanded the loyalty of the upper echelon (i.e., the lesser kings, nobles, and the clergy), disagreed. Unrest in Armenia and a revolt by Jamasp, Kavadh's brother, further complicated the situation.

Under Peroz, a large segment of the Iranian population had fared very poorly. Famine and pointless wars in the east had taken their toll on the granaries and the treasury alike. Peroz had tried to arrange a loan from Byzantium, but no assistance had materialized. Upon his gaining enough power to withstand internal opposition, Kavadh tried to free some of the wealth that had accumulated at the top. Zarmihr and his supporters opposed Kavadh's plan vehemently. Considering the extent of wealth and power of the minor kings and the nobles, as well as the process of accumulation and consolidation of power in ancient Iran, it was

foolhardy for anyone to attempt such a drastic reform. Kavadh tried it nevertheless.

Seeking a plan or a policy that would limit the power of the rich and allow the masses a free hand to influence affairs, Kavadh came across a reformer named Mazdak who preached a doctrine of peace through sharing of property.³⁵¹ Kavadh invited Mazdak into his inner circle, evaluated his plan and, against all advice, adopted the reforms and imposed them on Iranians, as well as non-Iranians like the Arabs, under his rule.³⁵² The class struggle that followed the implementation of the reforms swept Kavadh out of office.

In 496 CE, the last year of Kavadh's first term, three forces were vying for power in Iran: Kavadh, who had lost most of his support; Mazdak, who was enjoying the benefits of his communistic reforms; and the minor kings, nobles, and *mu'bad*s, who intended to keep the status quo.³⁵³ In this clash, as mentioned, the minor kings, nobles, and *mu'bad*s won. In the course of a *coup d'état*, they seized Kavadh, tried him, and imprisoned him in the "Castle of Oblivion." Kavadh, it seems, still enjoyed the support of a large number of the upper echelon of the society—the council's vote to execute him did not receive a majority vote.

Once again, Kavadh sought assistance from the Hephthalites. Having fled from the prison in southwestern Iran, Kavadh made his way to the camp of the nomads and asked for assistance. The Hephthalites supported Kavadh again and restored him to kingship for a second term. Three years after having been overthrown, Kavadh returned to power by overthrowing his brother, Jamasp. During his longer rule of thirty-two years—as opposed to eight years for the first term—Kavadh not only moderated his reforms but also changed his stance vis-à-vis the Mazdakites. Under the guidance of the orthodox clergy and with the help of his younger son, Prince Khosrau, Kavadh agreed to aid in undermining Mazdak's power and prestige.

As a first step toward discrediting Mazdak, Kavadh and Khosrau summoned the *mu'bad* of Pars to Ctesiphon. They hoped that the *mu'bad* would be able to prove that Mazdak, far from being the Messiah he claimed to be, was a mere astronomer. The *mu'bad* asked Mazdak many questions regarding theology and astronomy before addressing Mazdak's social reforms.

The *Mu'bad* of Pars Meets Mazdak

Mu'bad: With regard to the sharing of women, if twenty men were allowed to sleep with the same woman and one of them made her pregnant, who of those men, for matters of inheritance, would be the father?¹

Mazdak: I cannot name the father.

Mu'bad: If everyone were allowed to partake equally of the means of subsistence on earth, how would the King of Kings reward a subject for the good he had done?

Mazdak: I do not have an answer to that. I do say, in my own defense, however, that I do not have any claim to personal knowledge. What I preach is revealed doctrine dictated by the sacred fire. If responsible at all, I am responsible to the sacred fire alone.

By bribing one of Mazdak's close friends, Khosrau discovered that Mazdak had recently acquired a piece of property adjacent to the temple of fire. From that property, he had dug a tunnel ending underneath the place of the fire in the temple. Mazdak had been communicating with the fire by placing a man in that spot, a man who would recite prepared responses to his queries. The disclosure of this trickery destroyed Mazdak's credibility and prestige at the court.

Kavadh and Khosrau, however, did not reveal their intention to Mazdak. On the contrary, they promoted Mazdak long enough to obtain a list containing the names of his followers. With that list, they sought out some 12,000 Mazdakites and exterminated them along with their leader (c. 528–29 CE).³⁵⁴

The Mazdakite movement often overshadows the achievements of King Kavadh who fought two major wars against Byzantium and was victorious in both. He fought his former allies, the Hephthalites, for ten years (503–513 CE) and all but decimated their power, clearing the way for their demise during the reign of Khosrau I. Finally, Kavadh crowned his achievements with a series of long-term reforms that also bore fruit during the reign of Khosrau I.

MAZDAKISM

Mazdak appeared during the early years of Kavadh's first term (488–496 CE), preaching a dualistic doctrine that manifested itself both on the spiritual and societal levels. On the spiritual plain, Mazdak spoke about the conflict between the forces of light (good) and darkness (evil). He believed that light was absolutely free in its actions while ignorance limited darkness. On the social level, synthesizing economics, philosophy, and theology, Mazdak preached a communistic doctrine espousing communal ownership of both property and women.³⁵⁵

In essence, Mazdak taught a doctrine of reformed Zoroastrianism—one closer to the dictates of the ancient prophet than to the creed preached by his contemporary *mu'bad*s. He argued that God, rather than for a chosen few, had placed the means of subsistence in the world for all mankind. Human beings, Mazdak said, have wronged each other. As a result, a few have taken possession of the entire means of subsistence, depriving the multitude of the enjoyment of the bounty of God. He also spoke against hatred and strife.³⁵⁶

As the trustee of Kavadh, Mazdak persuaded his followers to dispossess those in the realm who had hoarded property and had filled their harems with countless women. The common people, who had suffered enormously at the hands of the kings, nobles, and *mu'bad*s, seized this opportunity to invade the houses of the wealthy and forcibly deprive them of their dwellings, women, and wealth.

Mazdakism shares certain features with Manicheism.³⁵⁷ Like Mani, Mazdak preached asceticism and forbade the slaughter of cattle. For this reason, when Mazdak tried to proclaim his reforms as a return to orthodox Zoroastrianism, the established clergy opposed him vehemently, criticizing Mazdak for both Manichean and communistic tendencies. Zoroaster had neither sanctioned

asceticism nor preached a doctrine of sharing of wives and property. The minor kings and nobles, too, rejected Mazdak's reforms outright because in them they saw the demise of the traditional Iranian lifestyle and of their own sources of support. However, the King of Kings, who saw in Mazdak's reforms a tool for curbing the excesses of the minor kings, nobles, and the clergy, supported the reforms wholeheartedly. As a result, for a while, Mazdak found acceptance at the royal court. During that time, Mazdak, rather than the chief priest, participated in the major social functions of the realm and, of course, used this privilege to proselytize freely.

Mazdakism represented the intellectual growth and the collective thought of Iranians between the rise of the Sassanid Dynasty (224 CE) and the time of Kavadh (488 CE). During this time, it seemed that both the world and the Iranian people had changed. After the injection of Manichean thought into the otherwise pristine view of the universe, criticism and rebellion against authority were not reprehensible sins any more. In fact, by including Kavadh among his followers, Mazdak proved that the king and the peasant shared humanity on the same level and that they were equally in need of the bounty of *Uhrmazd* on earth. Where would this place the credibility of the divine right of kings?

The last Sassanid monarch to seriously consider the root cause of malaise in pre-Islamic Iran was Khosrau I. Reviewing the efforts of the monarchs before him (including legendary kings such as Jamshid, Kayka'us, and Kaykhosrau), *Anushiravan* discovered that Shapur I and Kavadh had tried to remedy the apparent manifestations of what ailed Iran, jeopardizing the very essence of kingship in the process. They had been very much like Jamshid and Kayka'us, while Iran needed the emergence of a Kaykhosrau.

The society that the *mu'bad*s had created in the name of *Uhrmazd* was intended to benefit the masses but, in the end, it benefited themselves, the King of Kings, the kings, the warriors, and the nobles. As a result, in the process of creating a just society, those in charge of dispensing justice had systematically obstructed it. *Anushiravan* decided to usher in justice in the manner of Kaykhosrau; rather than by looking for reformers like Mani and Mazdak to set them up, he set himself up as the real judge to renovate Iran.

In order to communicate his intentions clearly to all, he symbolized his rule of justice in a bell, installed at the main gate of his palace. Even an animal, he said, if maltreated by an owner after it is old, can seek justice from him by sounding that bell. Within a short time, *Anushiravan's* kingdom was relieved of tyranny, and the threats to the internal security of the nation ceased.

Anushiravan, however, was the exception not the rule. Soon after him the monarchs returned to the practices of the past, promoting alienation of those who knew about the tyranny of the court but, due to circumstances, did not voice any concern. This new attitude was strengthened by Zurvanism, which was now nourished by the legacies of Manicheism and Mazdakism.³⁵⁸

Known to the classical sources as Chosroes,³⁵⁹ to the Arabic sources as Kisra, and to the Iranians as *Anushiravan-i 'Adil*,³⁶⁰ Khosrau I ruled for forty-eight years. His rule was autocratic, but tempered with justice. Because of this balance, he is remembered as one of the most distinguished reformers and law-givers in the history of his country.

Little is known about Khosrau's early life except that he was born around 510 CE, the son of Kavadh I and a peasant girl. Reportedly, Kavadh I, while escaping to the land of the Hephthalites, had married that girl, though this is only one of many legends reported about the circumstances of Khosrau's birth.

As we have seen, early in his life, Khosrau became involved in the opposition against the Mazdakites and assisted his father in undermining the power of the reformer. Working with his father on matters of state had many advantages for Khosrau. He learned first hand, for instance, not only much about administration and military affairs, but also about the enormous power that the minor kings, nobles, and *mu'bad*s wielded in the government of Iran. As king,³⁶¹ he launched a program of reforming the military, the tax structure, and the government bureaucracy.³⁶²

In order to safeguard the security and the prestige of the country, Khosrau I decentralized the army. He settled his subject tribes in the four marches of the empire and appointed four chief commanders to them: one to check the invasion of the Western Turks in the east, one to deal with the Byzantines and their Arab allies, one to check the nomadic Hephthalites in the Central Asian steppe, and one to guard the South. To help his commanders, in addition to building many fortresses and defensive walls, he assigned each commander soldiers, either paid or conscripted, and a number of nobles. The latter action freed him from the immediate interference of the nobles in the affairs of state. Only the bureaucracy and the clergy remained near him at the center.

Equipped with the knowledge of the extent and significance of his father's reforms, Khosrau I also undertook a program of reforming the tax system. At the time of his death, Kavadh I was implementing a far-reaching taxation plan that was based on an accurate assessment of the land holdings in the country as well as the amount of yield. As king, Khosrau I completed the implementation of that plan. He also ordered a census to be taken of the population, livestock, and palm and olive trees, so that a head tax could be imposed on the basis of the status of his subjects in the realm as well as their ability to pay. Taxes were collected three times a year and, unlike before, in cash. The practice not only facilitated record keeping, but limited the amounts that the government could spend on wars and reforms as well. Khosrau I's program of taxation lasted into Islamic times.

The reform of the tax system alone would not have yielded Khosrau I's desired results were the reforms not accompanied by measures to expand agriculture. In this regard, Khosrau I launched a program of expanding the cultivated lands by adding new lands to the existing farms. The expansion into new lands, of course, demanded access to more water and seed grain; therefore, he introduced new

measures for increasing irrigation through the use of canals and created incentives so that farmers could access the water and seed necessary for their new fields. The remnants of Khosrau I's canals are still seen in the Nahsawan canal system in present-day Iraq.

Before turning his attention to foreign affairs, Khosrau I reorganized the internal affairs department, which was in need of reform due to the Mazdakite movement and the damage that it had incurred to the administration and the economy. Khosrau I sought out those who were wronged by Mazdak's reforms and compensated their damages.³⁶³ He forced those who held confiscated property to return such property to the rightful owners without question, and he also reformed the bureaucracy by creating a number of *divans* under his prime minister, Buzurgmihr. Khosrau I, however, distinguished property from inherent rights, which he did not return to the old aristocracy. Instead, he created a new class of *dihqans* (land magnates) and invested the power in them to ensure that they would be loyal subjects of the throne.³⁶⁴

Once roads and bridges were rebuilt, villages were rehabilitated, canals were cleaned, and lost livestock were restored to the people, commerce picked up and the quality of life in the realm was improved. Ctesiphon became the hub of economic activity, and artisans, poets, and sages from all around flooded the court. The sages sought to hold discussions about medicine, philosophy, and astronomy with their colleagues at the court of the king, especially with his well-known court minister, Buzurgmihr. Among these savants of the age were seven Roman refugees who, following the closure of the ancient Academy of Athens in 529 CE, had been invited to Iran. They were greatly instrumental in establishing the medical college of Gundishapur in the city of the same name.³⁶⁵

In foreign affairs, too, Iran fared quite well. Under Khosrau I, now called *Anushiravan*, the wars between Iran and Rome continued. Nine years after ascending the throne, Khosrau I invaded and captured the city of Antioch. For the countless prisoners that he brought from the west, he built the city of Veh Antiok Khosrau. He also invaded Yemen, which at the time was ruled by Ethiopia. With the capture of Yemen, the control of the Spice Route from India to Byzantium fell into Iranian hands. Yemen remained under Iranian control until the end of the Sassanid era (651 CE).

While Khosrau I was fighting in the west, the Hephthalites had regained their power in the east. Thus, after a decade of war on the western front, Khosrau I began another series of campaigns in the east. Whereas in the west he had used sheer offensive tactics, in the east he resorted to diplomacy. He allied Iran with the Western Turks, enemies of the Hephthalites. Together, they invaded and overthrew the Hephthalites, and the spoils were divided equally among the Iranians and the Western Turks, establishing the Oxus as the boundary between the two kingdoms of Iran and Turkistan. The demise of the Hephthalites, of course, did not assure the security of Iran. Iranian and later Muslim rulers had to carry on a losing battle against the Turks. At the beginning of the eleventh century, the Turks established their supremacy in the region. Khosrau I's relations with the

other eastern neighbors, especially India, were cordial and rewarding.

Many Indian traditions were presented to the King of Kings to be incorporated into the culture of Iran. Among these was the well known *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, which was translated from Sanskrit into Pahlavi at this time. However, the literary piece that most reveals the cordial relations between Iran and India is a Middle Persian text about the invention of the games of chess and backgammon.³⁶⁶ After the game of chess was tested in India, it was sent to Iran with an Indian envoy who, on behalf of the king of India, challenged the dexterity and intelligence of the Iranians. India's challenge was met, and a response from Iran in the form of another board, the game of backgammon, was sent. While the game of chess was based on military tactics, the game of backgammon employed symbolic references to the Zoroastrian creation myth, including the deity, the conflict between light and darkness, free will, and the Resurrection Day.³⁶⁷

Hormuzd IV

(r. 579–590 CE)

Khosrau I was succeeded by his son, Hormuzd IV.³⁶⁸ In the west, Hormuzd IV continued to engage the Byzantines without achieving any noteworthy gains. In the east, however, the situation was different. When the khaqan of the Turks invaded Iran and plundered the cities of Balkh and Herat, Hormuzd commissioned his most worthy general, Bahram Chubin, to punish the Turks. In the course of a battle that took place near Balkh, Bahram routed the Turkish army and killed the Khaqan. In a separate battle, he captured the son of the Khaqan with a great deal of booty.

Bahram then was commissioned to move to the western front and engage the Byzantines in Lazika. Bahram was not as successful in this mission as he had been in his eastern missions. He was defeated. Hormuzd IV insulted Bahram by sending him a dress and a spindle.

Furious at his king, Bahram invaded Ctesiphon. There, joined by other Iranians who also were frustrated with Hormuzd IV, he took the king prisoner. Hormuzd IV was killed in 590 CE.³⁶⁹

Khosrau II (*Parviz*)

(r. 590–628 CE)

Khosrau II, the grandson of Khosrau I (*Anushiravan*), ruled for thirty-eight years. Under Khosrau II, the last great king of the Sassanid era, the empire reached its greatest expansion. After him the dynasty began its decline. Under Yazdegerd III, Iran fell to the Arab invaders in 651 CE.

After his return to Iran, Khosrau II strengthened his forces and, upon the death of Emperor Maurice, embarked on a program of conquest. On the western front, he destroyed the Arab kingdom of Hira in 603 CE; next he invaded Byzantium, recaptured Armenia, and marched across Cappadocia in 610 CE. The following year, he captured Gaza and invaded Egypt, and after that he captured Babylon (the ancient name for Cairo) and Alexandria. His armies extended their reach up the Nile River as far as Ethiopia. In the north, he seized the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in 615 CE before he returned to Anatolia. Next, he marched across Asia Minor, captured Ancyra (Ankara), and besieged the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 617 CE. On the eastern front, he defeated the final Hephthalite incursions, instigated by the rulers of Turkistan.

These victories would not have materialized for Khosrau II were it not for the untiring efforts of two of his generals: Shahrbaraz and Shahin. Together they pushed the frontiers of Iran almost as far west as had their Achaemenid ancestors. In 622 CE, however, the Byzantines turned the tide of Iranian conquests. Within six years of that date, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (610–641 CE) defeated Khosrau II at Nineveh, less than a hundred miles from his capital of Ctesiphon. This sudden turn of events stunned Khosrau Parviz. Like his father, he blamed his generals and the common people for his misfortunes. He ordered the slaughter of large numbers of prisoners, executed Shahrbaraz, and desecrated Shahin's corpse. For these and many other insane acts of vengeance against the innocent, Khosrau II was killed in 628 CE, at the hand of his own son born to a Roman princess.

Khosrau II was a bad-tempered, highly insecure, and egotistical person. During his thirty-eight years as king, he executed almost all Sassanid males eligible to ascend the throne as well as scores of generals and men of distinction. He is reported to have had 3,000 wives, excluding thousands of women employed in his court as singers, dancers, and maids. He also had 3,000 man servants, 8,500 horses and camels, 76 elephants, and 12,000 mules.³⁷⁰ Khosrau II's treasury boasted of untold riches and significant amounts of jewelry. It contained, among other priceless items, chess sets of ruby and emerald, backgammon sets of coral and turquoise, asbestos napkins, ivory thrones, and crowns studded with pearls the size of a sparrow's egg. Acquisition of these rare objects would not have been possible without exacting heavy taxes on the merchants, landowners, and craftsmen, as well as gouging the nobles and the minor kings. Everyone had to contribute to the opulence of the court of the king, an opulence that is usually exemplified in the following description of one of four carpets in Khosrau II's palace, representing the four seasons of the year:

Khusraw Parviz³⁷¹ commissioned what must have been the most expensive carpet in history, which was laid in the palace at Ctesiphon, the Sassanid capital. According to later Arab sources this was designed with astonishing realism as an enormous garden, with flowerbeds, stones, trees and streams represented by gold and silver thread, silk and precious stones; the intention was that the king should be able to enter the hall and, whatever the season, believe it was springtime.

Unfortunately, the Arabs who overthrew the Persian monarchy appreciated the carpet so much that they cut it up to share it out; the pieces were dispersed, and vanished centuries ago.³⁷²

Khosrau Parviz is known to have had three sources of joy: his beloved wife, Shirin; his musician, Borbad; and his horse, Shabdiz. Borbad's life story sheds light on the life of the court as a whole. There is no hard evidence on Borbad's date of birth;³⁷³ however, we can estimate that he was born toward the end of the sixth century, somewhere between 580 and 590 CE. This estimate is based on Firdowsi's assertion that Borbad was a young musician at the court of Khosrau Parviz at the turn of the seventh century, i.e., sometime between 600 and 610 CE.

Borbad's place of birth, too, is yet to be established. Early sources (Musa Ibn-i Isa-i Kasravi, Abu Ishaq-i Istakhri, Abu Mansur-i Tha'alibi, and others) relate him to the city of Merv, a major center of culture during the Sassanid era. Iranian literature in general also refers to him as Borbad-i Marvazi. The contradicting sources include the seventh century Arabian poet Khalid Faizi and Zakariya-i Qazvini (1203–1283 CE). The latter, in his *Asar al-Bilad wa Akhbar al-Ibad* refers to the town of Jahrum, in Fars Province, as the birthplace of the bard. The most logical place for the development of the musician's talent, however, seems to have been Merv.

At the time of his arrival at the court of Khosrau Parviz in Ctesiphon (Mada'in), Borbad was already an accomplished musician. He seems to have begun at the lower courts and gradually worked his way up to the higher courts, quite in the same way that Farrukhi Sistani visited 'Amid As'ad and Abu al-Muzaffar Ahmad Ibn-i Muhammad Chaghani before entering the service of the Samanid amirs of Bukhara.

In Ctesiphon, Borbad came in contact with Sarkash, a harp player, who headed the king's entertainment department. Every new artist, before he could be heard by the king, was examined by Sarkash. Borbad was no exception. Upon hearing Borbad's wonderful voice and appreciating his skill, the aging Sarkash recognized the threat that the young musician posed. He left instructions to keep the young musician away from the court.

Borbad, too, realized that as long as Sarkash was Khosrau Parviz's chief of entertainment, the gate of the court was closed to him. He, therefore, entered the king's pleasure palace with the assistance of a friend—the king's chamberlain. One night, when the king was being entertained, he camouflaged himself among the high branches of a nearby tree by wearing green clothes. When the king's goblet was filled, he sang *Dadafarid* (source of justice), his first song for the occasion. The king was pleased. He ordered the garden to be searched and the musician to be found and brought to him. Borbad could not be found.

When the king's cup was filled a second time, Borbad sang his second song, called *Paikar-i Gurd* (battle of the brave). Again the king ordered the premises to be searched and again Borbad could not be found. When the king's goblet was filled for the third time, Borbad sang his *Sabz dar Sabz* (green on green). Hearing that, the king drank deep. Then he rose and said:

Search the entire garden and the flower-beds
To left and right, for I will fill his mouth
And lap with gems, and he shall be chief minstrel.³⁷⁴

Upon hearing that Borbad climbed down, introduced himself, and stood aside. Sarkash was shamed by the discovery. Turning to Sarkash, Khosrau said:

Unskillful one,
Like colocynth while he is sugar-like!
Why didst thou bar his access to me thus?
Thy harp is banished from this company.³⁷⁵

Borbad retained the status of “King of Bards” at Parviz’s court for some eighteen to twenty years thereafter.

Like the date of his birth, the time and circumstances of Borbad’s death are also unknown. Some sources report that he was poisoned by Sarkash while Khosrau Parviz was still living. Others attribute his death to the jealousy of other bards. Still others state that he survived Khosrau Parviz but left the court during the rule of Shiruyeh. The latter scenario further states that Borbad went to Isfahan and lived the rest of his life in that city.

Borbad is reported to have composed songs for every month and every day of the year. A skillful artist and the king’s companion, he could relay the most distressing news to the Khosrau without being chastised. For instance, Khosrau Parviz had said that whoever brought him the news of the death of his horse, Shabdiz, would be executed. When Shabdiz died, Borbad wrote a song. In it he conveyed the sad news without verbalizing it. Hearing that the king said, “You sing as if Shabdiz were dead!” Borbad retorted, “Your majesty, you said it yourself.”

Returning to Khosrau II, he merely extended the territory of the empire to its Achaemenid boundaries. Unlike the early Achaemenid and Sassanid monarchs, however, he was oblivious to the great changes beyond Rome that shaped the policies and the aspirations of his neighboring kingdoms. If he were aware of those changes, his actions indicate that he was too conceited to consider them serious and, thereby, worthy of attention. His attitude toward his Arab neighbors, for instance, is apparent from the reception that two bare-footed Bedouins sent by the Prophet Muhammad received when they brought the following letter from the Prophet to him:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Muhammad the Apostle of God to Khusraw son of Hormuzd. But to proceed. Verily I extol unto thee God, beside whom there is no other God; He it is who guarded me when I was an orphan, and made me rich when I was destitute, and guided me when I was straying in error. Only he who is bereft of understanding, and over whom calamity triumphs, rejects the message which I am sent to announce. O Khusraw! Submit and thou shalt be safe, or else prepare to wage with God and with his apostle, a war which shall not find them helpless! Farewell!³⁷⁶

Reportedly, Khosrau II tore up the letter and ordered the *satrap* of Yemen to march on Medina, seize the author of the letter, and bring him to Ctesiphon in

chains. The reaction of the king and his courtiers to the Bedouins and their message was predictable. They marveled at the ignorance of the Arabs, who apparently did not know that the King of Kings had recently defeated the Byzantine Emperor. The Arabs, however, knew that and more. They knew also that the King of Kings had all but ended the line of Sassan and that his distant relatives vied perennially over the decaying corpse of his degenerating monarchy.

Kavadh II

(r. 628–630 CE)

Shiruyeh, Khosrau II's son, ascended the throne under the throne name of Kavadh II. His short rule of two years, before he died of plague, saw the signing of a peace treaty with Byzantium. In fact, as a good will gesture, he returned the Holy Cross that in 615 CE his father had seized. He also eliminated all the claimants to the throne, as well as his own major generals.

Ardashir III

(r. 630–631 CE)

Ardashir III succeeded Kavadh II at a time that the Khazars were invading Armenia and Georgia. Ardashir III commissioned his general Shahrbaraz to defeat the Khazars but, instead, the Khazars defeated Shahrbaraz. The defeated Shahrbaraz, supported by Heraclites of Byzantium, attacked Ctesiphon, captured Ardashir III, and announced himself king.

The ascension of a commoner, Shahrbaraz, was not acceptable to Iranian nobles. Khosrau III, a cousin of Hormuzd IV, rose against Shahrbaraz. Eventually, the nobles settled on the kingship of his sister, Azarmidukht.

It is noteworthy that at the same time Hormuzd V, a cousin of Khosrau Parviz, crowned himself king at Nasibin, but he was killed by his own soldiers.

Yazdegerd III

(r. 632–651 CE)

Yazdegerd III was preceded by some eleven other kings, some of whom had dubious genealogies. Between 628 and 632 CE, twelve rulers—six in 631 CE—ascended the throne, including two of the daughters of Khosrau II, Pourandukht (631 CE) and Azarmidukht (632 CE).³⁷⁷ Yazdegerd III (632–651 CE), whose legitimacy as a Sassanid king is questionable, was the last monarch of the dynasty. He was a mere child when he was first put on the throne. In fact, he is reported to have fled to Istakhr for fear of becoming king; he was, nevertheless, brought to Ctesiphon and installed.

Like Darius III, who was overwhelmed by Alexander and could not implement any reforms, Yazdegerd III was overwhelmed by the Arab invaders. The actual power, it goes without saying, was in the hands of the four generals who had installed Yazdegerd III on the throne. Their houses had been responsible for the security of the marches since the time of Khosrau I. Those marches now had

become prosperous kingdoms that, they felt, belonged to them more than to the child king. Their refusal to cooperate with the king at a crucial time in the history of Iran weakened the central administration and made it vulnerable to incursions from the outside.

In the first year of Yazdegerd III's rule, 632 CE, the Arab invasion of Iran and the East began. In 636 CE, Yazdegerd III lost the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah. He fled from Ctesiphon to Media, hoping that his generals would hold off the invasion. They could not. The Sassanid forces were defeated again at Nihavand in 642 CE. Yazdegerd III sought refuge in district after district until he was slain in Merv. With his death, the Sassanid Empire, as well as Iranian rulership, came to a close.

ZURVANISM

Earlier, in relation to the choice of a religion for his kingdom, it was mentioned that Shapur I entertained an alternate to Manicheism, i.e., Zurvanism. In what follows, Zurvanism is discussed as an ideology that permeated the rule of the last Sassanid monarchs.

Zurvanism specifies that limitless, eternal, and uncreated Time is the source of being and all that flows from it.³⁷⁸ For a thousand years, Zurvan (Time Eternal) offered sacrifices so that out of merit for his devotion, he would be granted a son. He was not granted a son. Gradually, doubt destroyed Zurvan's steadfast belief in the merit of sacrifice. Because of his doubt, two sons were born to him. *Abriman*, the evil personification of his doubt, issued from the womb first and ruled for nine thousand years, creating the world's demons in the process.³⁷⁹ Then *Uhrmazd*, the blessed fulfillment of his desire, issued from the womb and ruled the skies, creating the heaven and the earth in the process. The struggle between the two adversaries must result in the restoration of the Absolute. This was the creed that was promoted by the early Sassanids, especially Ardashir I and Shapur I.³⁸⁰

Zurvanism was a response to the dualistic principle on which Orthodox Zoroastrianism draws. The question was this: If two principles are in existence, where is their unique source and which of the principles is primary? Neither, responded the Zurvanites, who espoused the belief that the creation of the universe, rather than the act of God, was the result of an evolutionary development whereby the formless, primeval matter—the infinite time and space—assumed finite form. By rejecting the existence of heaven, hell, afterlife, reward, and punishment—the major sources of hope and fear of humanity—the Zurvanites promoted a fatalistic attitude that permeated society with pessimism and doom. Time and fate, they said, decide all.³⁸¹

Zurvanism, of course, had existed before the time of the late Sassanids, when it took over the society with a vengeance. In fact, the darkest aspects of Manicheism offer a much more optimistic view than Zurvanism, just as the communistic side of Mazdakism is a mild version of the homogeneity that time would decree. Zurvanism emerged after the rule of Khosrau I in a society that had already

undergone changes.

The mythical community that accepted Kaykhosrau and his *farr* had not been struggling with larger issues such as the place of humanity in the universe, the apparent impotence of good, and the primacy of evil. Neither had it dealt with the more concrete aspects of life, such as coping with the difficulties of giving up the freedom of a tribal existence for the confining comfort of urban life. Things such as social mobility had not been issues of concern under an accepted *Aburic* Order, but increasingly, they were becoming the main points of peoples' concern.

Unable to penetrate the invisible walls that surrounded their own existence and which blocked their children's path to prosperity, the Sassanids became complacent and fell prey to the fatalism of Zurvan. While the royal court struggled to keep itself afloat, the king's subjects struggled to keep themselves from self-destruction. In the past, it had been the king who looked for ways to reorder the society. In Sassanid Iran, it was the people who sought a faith that would forge a new rulership. Zurvanism thus sounded the death knell for orthodox Zoroastrianism, opening the way for Islam.

THE END OF THE SASSANID DYNASTY

The rise of the Sassanid Dynasty, like the Achaemenid Empire, was meteoric. Unlike the experience of the Achaemenids, however, the Sassanid Dynasty, which lasted for over four centuries, experienced periodic rises and declines. The first era of decline followed the consolidation of power by Shapur I and lingered until the reign of Shapur II, who regained much of Iran's lost territory and restored the dynasty's prestige. The pattern, nevertheless, was repeated by the immediate successors to Shapur II, including Kavadh during his first term. Under their rule, the dynasty was reduced to a destitute kingdom, looking to Rome for assistance. Named after the legendary Kaykhosrau, Khosrau I decimated the Hephthalites and raised the Persian empire to the heights it had enjoyed under Cyrus and Darius. His efforts, however, were marred by wars of succession. Khosrau II was the last monarch to rescue the dynasty. But rather than arresting the socio-political and economic malaise that plagued it, he concentrated his efforts on territorial expansion. What was not lost by Khosrau II himself toward the end of his rule, was lost by those who survived the tyranny of his last years. In addition to the internal turmoil, two fresh, nomadic peoples flanked Iran. In the east, the Western Turks sought the overlordship of Ma Wara' al-Nahr and Khurasan and, in the west, Arab Bedouins had their eyes on the riches of Ctesiphon. No power could have saved the moribund empire from the fate that awaited it.

The administrative structure of the Sassanid Dynasty was very much like that of the Achaemenid Empire. The king, especially during the reign of the early Sassanids, was in full control of the affairs of the state. The King of Kings chose all the kings as well as appointed his heir to the throne. The day-to-day decisions were made by the Grand Wazir, who also served as the king's counselor.

Under the early Sassanids, the commands of the army and the marches were intertwined with the administration of townships and villages. The smallest unit of governance was the village. Chosen from among the influential people of the village, the village head administered the village and its surrounding fields. A number of villages in the same region were administered by a district chief chosen from among the influential individuals in the district. The district chief lived in the largest village of the district. The next larger unit, the province, was administered by a provincial governor appointed by the regional governor. In charge of the administration of a number of provinces, the regional governor was appointed by the King of Kings and permitted to carry the title of king. The extent of the territorial authority of the regional governor was determined by the King of Kings.

In an effort to revitalize class distinctions that had been lost under the Seleucid and Parthian rulers, the early Sassanids had installed a complementary socioeconomic aspect to the governance structure. The overhauled system was complete with distinct clothing, housing, insignia, and means of transportation for each class. From birth, individuals were tied to a fixed and permanent occupation. Since the occupations were assigned by divine will, no one could either alter them or abandon them for other callings. Professions, such as those of the members of the military, the scribes, or the priestly caste, were absolutely beyond the reach of the sons of shoemakers, builders, and peasants. Only very talented youths, if they could impress the king, would be allowed to join the army, the priesthood, or the correspondence bureau.

At the apex, the King of Kings and the royal family enjoyed the revenue of the crown lands as well as the benefit of enormous gifts brought from the many lands under the rule of the crown. Being the most influential family in the land, thousands of men and women served the royal family in various capacities. Among the members of the first family, the crown prince, usually governing one of the important *satrapies*, held the most power and prestige. The most important court offices were those of the chamberlain, the chief of protocol, the king's confidant, the royal astrologer, and the keeper of the seals. In addition to those, of course, were the royal clowns, harem attendants, and serfs who worked the land.

Consisting of a number of ministers, the Grand Wazir's cabinet controlled a large bureaucracy, connecting the royal court with its subjects. The members of the cabinet of ministers were the chief priest, who also managed the temples of fire; the chief judge, who oversaw the correct execution of the judicial decrees of the king; the commander-in-chief, who took charge of the various branches of the army; the chief of the scribes, who issued all edicts; and the minister of agriculture and commerce, who was responsible for assigning and collecting revenue as well as for keeping an exact record of the income and expenditures of the realm. For each office, the King of Kings had a special seal. After a minister had presented his report, if it was satisfactory, the King of Kings would seal the report and have it placed in the archives by the keeper of the royal seals.

The clerical apparatus at the court was part of the Sassanid bureaucracy usually referred to as the *divan*. It included the offices of the judiciary, treasury, revenue

collection and reallocation, court income, royal stables, non-profit activities, and the chief court physician. The correspondence bureau attended to the communication between the ruler and his subjects as well as between the ruler and his allies and foes on the international scene. All edicts, treaties, land grants, and appointment documents were processed in this office and dispatched. Each document carried a different weight and required a different writing style. The scribes, therefore, were organized hierarchically, depending on the range of skills each scribe commanded. Books of advice, dictated by the king, were also penned by the scribes and embellished by the court artists. These works, usually addressed to the heir apparent, described the king's personal views on government, providing guidelines for future kings.

Because of the proximity of the office of the chief scribe to that of the King of Kings, and because the office dealt in secret documents, each needing a particular nuance or style, often the efforts of the chief scribe were subjected to intense criticism. In such cases, the life of the chief scribe hung in the balance. Shapur I, for instance, is known to have strangled his chief scribe with his own hands for a sentence construed to have been insulting to the court.

The postal service was intimately connected to the office of the chief scribe. The main responsibility of the postmaster was conveyance of information from one point in the empire (usually the capital of Ctesiphon) to another point. The postmasters, both the one at the capital and those in the provinces, were also responsible for reporting extraordinary events to the King of Kings. This, however, was done indirectly.

Shapur of Azerbaijan

A record of the wealth of Shapur of Azerbaijan reveals that his valuables included 20,000,000 *dinars* of pure gold; 500,000 *dinars* in gold and silver utensils; 600,000 *dinars* in precious stones; 30,000 horses and mules; 20,000 sheep; 30,000 camels; 1,700 Turkish, Roman, and Abyssinian slaves; and 400 female slaves. It should be added that Shapur was not a particularly distinguished nobleman, simply one for whose wealth a record is in existence—and that this account omits the extremely large harem a noble such as Shapur would have held. After all, some nobles are reported to have held harems of more than 1,000 women.

During the Sassanid era, the *chapar* had opened a local branch as well. It carried messages from local governors to local administrators. These carriers, however, were not using fast horses and did not pass the mail to waiting carriers. They often walked from village to village and distributed the mail. They, too, reported their assessment of the conduct of affairs at the lower levels to their superiors. The fast *chapar*, now using camels in addition to horses, continued the tradition of moving the mail as quickly as possible.

Due to the King of Kings' interest in its decrees, the office of the chief judge was a most difficult office to manage. Nevertheless, Sassanid law was based on the *Avesta*, the interpretation of the text of the *Avesta*, and the decrees of the chief priest. In addition, in difficult cases, both the accuser and the accused were asked to take an oath or to undergo an ordeal to prove their innocence. The ordeals included walking through the fire and emerging unharmed or sustaining one's composure while molten metal was poured on one's chest. As a rule, the judicial system favored the powerful, especially the King of Kings and the kings, and oppressed the multitude. Punishments, depending on the nature of the crime and the mood of the king or the chief judge, included lashes of the whip, maiming, long imprisonment, and death.

Stationed below the royal court and the Wazir's bureaucracy were the regional governors, otherwise known as minor kings. They acquired land and water from the King of Kings. The income from these landholdings was partially returned to the King of Kings as gifts. Most of the rest, however, was distributed among the nobles and the clergy to sustain their loyalty. Without the loyalty of the nobles and the clergy, the minor kings could not muster the huge armies expected of them to fight the wars of the King of Kings.

The minor kings headed large bureaucracies of their own. At the head of their administrative units were the chiefs of the agriculturists, the artisans, and the commercial magnates of the domain. The officers of the bureaucracy included the chief of protocol, the head of a royal guards unit, the head of land tax collection, the chief of treasury, and a number of tax collectors, accountants, and clerks.

The seven major families that were a part of the fabric of the Achaemenid power structure were present in the Sassanid structure as well. Families like the Qaren (in Rayy), the Suren (in Sistan), the Sipahbad (in Dehistan and Gurgan), and others were constantly at odds with the minor kings for the attention of the King of Kings. Receiving parcels of land from the minor kings and gifts from their subjects, the Sassanid nobles were the wealthiest landowners in the empire.

Much of the power of the King of Kings, minor kings, and the nobles was based on the influence of the priestly caste among the lower strata of the uneducated society. There were three temples of eternal fire in Iran at the time. They were the Azar Faranbagh or the fire of the priests, in Pars; the Azar Gushnasp or the royal fire, in Shiz, Azerbaijan; and Azar Barzin or the fire of the agriculturists, in Nishapur. The priests dominated the social, ethical, and personal aspects of life through the management of these temples. In addition, they sent their surrogates to the villages to propagate their teachings. As the *Vendidad*, the law book of the

faith, testifies, the priests saw demons lurking in almost every act, no matter how minor. The individual was duty-bound to confess any deed that could have aided the kingdom of evil; to atone, the sinner either had to be whipped a certain number of lashes or had to make a commensurate payment to the fire temple.³⁸² Minor lapses, like inadvertently breathing on the sacred fire, not placing pared nails under the hinges of a door where they should turn into dust, or neglecting to bury fallen hair strands while reciting the appropriate prayers created great spiritual predicaments from which one could escape only by paying a large sum of money. Since most of these so-called sinners did not have money, the *mu'bad*s accepted livestock and grain as well. These redemption fees continually added to the opulence of the fire temple and the prosperity of the ruling class.

The military mirrored the society of the time most perfectly. People from all walks of life appeared among the ranks of the army. They were assigned particular tasks, not necessarily compatible with their abilities. The nobleman's son became a commander; the small landowner's son became a cavalryman, and the serf's son an infantryman. Changing ranks, unless decreed by the king, was almost impossible.

The families that were most exploited were generally from three classes: 1) the *azatan*, comprising merchants, artisans, and landholders, all of whom were free; 2) the *bandakan*, comprising slaves and the serfs who tilled the land, offering their produce to the upper classes without question; and 3) at the very bottom, the *usara* or prisoners of war, who had no real status or rights. Even though they needed the small amount they made for purchasing seed grain and for attending to the needs of their herds, at every juncture, these poverty-stricken people were expected to offer expensive gifts to their superiors. If they could not afford gifts of gold and livestock, they were expected to offer their sons and daughters instead. Women, if they were beautiful, were forced into the harems of the kings, while boys were mostly expropriated for slavery at court or for military duty in the king's wars for expanding the empire.

Until the rule of Khosrau I, this arrangement kept the power in the hand of the King of Kings, allowing little room for manipulation by the minor kings, the nobles, and the priests. As already discussed, Khosrau I divided the army into four groups and placed them on the frontiers of the empire. He also decentralized the bureaucracy, creating a feudal society in the process. Within a short time after Khosrau I, commanders like Bahram Chubin took advantage of the weakness of the central administration and assailed the monarchy, aided by nobles and priests. That internal struggle for power, along with the inexhaustible wars with Byzantium over Armenia, eventually resulted in the collapse of the empire as a whole.

The Sassanid Empire grew rich in wealth as well as in art and culture. While the consolidation years were spent in wars, the latter years were spent in harvesting the fruits of those wars. Philosophers, physicians, artists, and poets flooded the court of the King of Kings to meet their peers and to contribute to the culture of their time. Many games, including the games of chess and backgammon, were made at this time as were the "star table," the predecessor of many later Islamic tables, and a special alphabet for the Avestan language. The codification of the

Avesta, the gathering of the history of ancient Iran, and the writing of the *Khudayname*, the source book for Firdowsi's *Shahname*, were all undertaken at this time. The mood of the age, however, is best captured in a Middle Persian text, a legacy of the Sassanid scribes, explaining the invention of the game of chess in India and of the game of backgammon in Iran.³⁸³

During the rule of the Sassanids, often what happened outside the country was as important as what happened within Iran. The important events of the time included the rise of Christianity and its influence on Zoroastrian thought, giving rise to Manicheism; acceptance of Christianity by Constantine the Great and soon after by Armenia, making Iran's hold on Armenia even more tenuous than it had been; and the division of the Roman Empire into the Byzantine and Roman Empires (395 CE). Among these, the fate of Armenia played a decisive role in the demise of the Sassanid Dynasty and in considerably weakening Byzantium, allowing the Arabs to assert their power in the region.

On the eastern front, the Kushans were replaced by the more powerful Hephthalites. Capitalizing on inherent divisions among Iranian claimants to the throne, the Hephthalites dictated Iranian policy for over fifty years. Khosrau I eliminated the Hephthalites, but he could not diminish the threat of the Western Turks, whose ranks continued to grow on the eastern marches of Iran. Using the base prepared by the Arabs on the ruins of the Sassanid domains, the Turks built a mighty empire, dictating terms even to the Caliphs of Islam.

The Arab influence grew gradually. For example, Hormuzd II was killed in a battle against the Arabs in 310 CE, and Bahram V would not have become king without the assistance of the Amir of Hira. Similarly, the Byzantines would not have been able to fight Iran without Arab assistance. In spite of all these indications of the rising power of the Arabs, especially after the formation of the tribal confederacy under the Prophet Muhammad, Iran never felt truly threatened by the growing might of Arabia. This blindness had three aspects. First, Iran never came to grips with the reality of its own socio-economic problems that were destroying the faith of the masses in the divinity of the rule of the King of Kings and of the *Ahuric* Order. Secondly, the later Sassanids, seemingly not learning anything from their predecessors, the later Achaemenids, allowed distrust of next-of-kin to decimate the line of deserving Sassanids, depriving the nation of badly needed leadership. Thirdly, they did not realize that wars, whether they end in victory or defeat, sap a country of its vitality and allow it to fall victim to external aggression.

¹³⁷ For a comprehensive description of the Iranian Plateau, see Cameron, 1936, pp. 1–5.

¹³⁸ For various theories regarding the anthropology of the Iranian Plateau before the coming of the Iranians, see Cameron, 1936, pp. 16–19.

¹³⁹ Regarding the origin of the Sialk culture, see Settegast, p. 44.

¹⁴⁰ Cf., Cameron, 1936, regarding the status of women in Elam at about the same time.

¹⁴¹ For a possible Elamite origin of brother and sister marriage, see Cameron, 1936, p. 20.

¹⁴² Ghirshman, 1954, pp. 25–63.

¹⁴³ For the appearance of the Iranians on the plateau, see Boyce, 1979, p. 39.

¹⁴⁴ For other objects discovered at Sialk and their significance, see Settegast, pp. 71–73.

¹⁴⁵ See Levy 1967; Karimi-Hakkak 1979; Yarshater 1983; and Bashiri, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ See Cameron 1936; Olmstead 1948; and Ghirshman 1965, 1971.

- 147 See Thieme 1958; For more recent developments, see Mallory, 1989, pp. 143–184.
- 148 Regarding the difficulties in interpretation, see Zaehner, 1975, pp. 28–29.
- 149 Cf., *Ahura/Asura*, in Zaehner, 1975, p.39; also pp. 82–84; see also Boyce, 1979, pp. 21–22; Childe provides further cultural differences such as clothing, burial rites, and use of horses. See Childe, 1987, pp. 40–41.
- 150 The word *ariya* means noble and *Ariyan* mean belonging to a noble family. For *Aryana Vaeja*, see Dhalla, pp. 8–9.
- 151 For further information on Zoroaster and the revolution that he brought about, especially in agriculture and treatment of animals, see Settegast, p. 127.
- 152 With regard to Zoroaster and sacrifice, see Zaehner, 1975, pp. 84–88.
- 153 For the extent of Ariyan involvement in the region, see Childe, pp. 16–41.
- 154 Pirnia, 1962, vol. 1, p. 185.
- 155 Pirnia, 1962, vol. 1, pp. 191–192.
- 156 For further detail on Urartu, see Avery, p. 8.
- 157 Cf., Collins, 1972, p. 18.
- 158 Pirnia, 1962, vol. 1, p.183.
- 159 Collins, 1972, pp. 11–18.
- 160 Zaehner, 1975, 20–21.
- 161 Herodotus, I, 130.
- 162 There is some evidence (cf., Pirnia, 1962, pp. 230–32) regarding the existence a Cyrus II and Cambyses II before Cyrus the Great. The evidence, however, is not considered strong enough to refer to Cyrus the Great as Cyrus III and his son Cambyses as Cambyses III. Following the beaten path, and to prevent confusion, we shall refer to Cyrus the Great as Cyrus II the Great and Cambyses as Cambyses II.
- 163 Kent, 1953, p. 116.
- 164 Ibid., p. 116.
- 165 See Darius's statement further below.
- 166 Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 128–131.
- 167 Herodotus, I, 108.
- 168 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 129.
- 169 Herodotus, I, 53.
- 170 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 131.
- 171 For the "Cyrus Cylinder," see the Appendix.
- 172 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 133.
- 173 Herodotus, I, 214.
- 174 For a synopsis of *Cyropaedia*, see the Appendix.
- 175 Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 387.
- 176 *Cartouche* is an oval encircling the name of a king or queen.
- 177 Clayton, p. 198.
- 178 Pirnia, vol. 2, p. 486; Herodotus III, 1–4.
- 179 Herodotus, III, 8, 9.
- 180 Herodotus refers to the same person as Smerdis.
- 181 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 136; according to Herodotus, Bardia accompanied Cambyses to Egypt and was killed later.
- 182 Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 387.
- 183 Pirnia, vol. 2, p. 490. According to Ghirshman, as a consequence of the activities of the 50,000, before they were lost, Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 137–38.
- 184 Pirnia, vol. 3, pp. 568–572.
- 185 Pirnia, vol. 2, pp. 502–505; Sami, 1970, p. 359.
- 186 Herodotus, III, 27–31.
- 187 Pirnia, vol. 2, p. 497; Ravandi, vol. 1, p 387.
- 188 For details of the controversy over the stabbing of the *Apis* Bull, see Ghirshman, 1965, p. 138.
- 189 For details, see Herodotus, III, 31–34; for next-of-kin marriages among the Achaemenids and

- Parthians, see Boyce, 1979, p. 97.
- 190 Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 563.
- 191 Not to be confused with Ecbatana in Media, Egbatana, Syria, is at the foot of Mount Carmel.
- 192 Herodotus, III, 29.
- 193 Pirnia, vol. 6, p. 15–28.
- 194 Soudavar, pp. 81–83.
- 195 Cf., Ghirshman, 1964, p. 129.
- 196 Mallowan, 1985, p. 394.
- 197 For a full discussion, see Bashiri, 2007, pp. 15–19; for the significance of crowns, especially during the rule of the Sassanids, see Gariboldi, pp. 6–13.
- 198 For identification of Gaumata as an imposter and steps to eliminate him, see Herodotus, III, 68–79.
- 199 For the relation between *farr* and merit, especially the possibility of losing it, as was the case with Jamshid, or gaining it, as was the case with Darius I, see Soudavar, pp. 43, 79–80.
- 200 Kent, 1953, p. 131.
- 201 The theme of the relief recalls the depiction by Assyrian rulers, who passed ropes through the noses of their captives and made them stand before them to receive justice.
- 202 For a discussion regarding whether Darius used *Ahura Mazda* out of religious conviction or to unify the country, see Soudavar, p. 91.
- 203 Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 566.
- 204 Ravandi, vol. 1, p. 520.
- 205 Pirnia, vol. 4, p. 1132.
- 206 *Darik* was a gold coin (89% gold), named after Darius I, who encouraged the establishment of a banking system in the empire.
- 207 Underground conduits for carrying water along vast stretches of the desert.
- 208 The *satrap* system was originally introduced by Cyrus II.
- 209 Cf., Herodotus, VIII, 98; see also Ghirshman, 1965, p. 145
- 210 For an account of the regions covered by the Royal Road, see Olmstead, 1970, pp. 299–301.
- 211 Olmstead, 1948, p. 146; Kent, 1953, p. 147. See also Herodotus, II, 158. A similar feat was undertaken by Xerxes I at Athos, see Olmstead, 1948, p. 248.
- 212 *Shekel* is a unit of weight.
- 213 Sami, 1970, p. 10.
- 214 Kent, 1953, p. 147.
- 215 According to the Egyptians, *Nut* (*Nit* in the Persian translation) was the mother of all Egyptian gods. Pirnia, vol. 3, p. 570.
- 216 Ibid.
- 217 For details, see Bashiri, 2007, p. 9–15.
- 218 Bashiri, 2007, p. 36.
- 219 Bashiri, 2007, p. 5.
- 220 Bashiri, 2007, p. 3.
- 221 Bashiri, 2007, p. 47.
- 222 Regarding *Ka'ba-i Zardusht* as a funerary chamber, see Boyce, 1979, pp. 59–60.
- 223 For details, see Bashiri, 2007, pp. 41–42.
- 224 For a full discussion, see Bashiri, 2007, pp.33–49.
- 225 Cf., Ghirshman, 1965, p. 152.
- 226 For details of succession rights and Xerxes as Darius's choice, see Herodotus, VII, 2–4.
- 227 See Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 190–91.
- 228 For Mardonius and the other neighbors of Attica in relation to convincing Xerxes to invade, see Herodotus, VII, 5–7.
- 229 Herodotus, VII, 10.
- 230 Herodotus, VII, 20.
- 231 Herodotus, VII, 22–25.
- 232 Herodotus, VII, 149.

- 233 For the organization of Xerxes's army and an idea about its size, see Herodotus, VII, 41; see also VII, 184–86.
- 234 For the full texts of both oracles, see Herodotus, VII, 140–41.
- 235 Herodotus, VII, 56, 60.
- 236 For the city-states and the numbers of vessels each contributed, see Herodotus, VIII, 1, 2.
- 237 For details, see Herodotus, VII, 202, 203.
- 238 For a detailed description of Xerxes's arrival in Athens, see Herodotus, VIII, 50–54.
- 239 For the discussion of why the Greeks decided to fight at Salamis, see Herodotus, VIII, 63.
- 240 For an account of the regions covered by the Royal Road, see Olmstead, 1970, pp. 299–301.
- 241 For details of the Battle of Salamis, see Olmstead, 1970, pp. 253–55.
- 242 See Herodotus, VIII, 97.
- 243 For details of Xerxes's appointing Mardonius to finish the war, see Herodotus, VIII, 107.
- 244 For Mardonius's negotiations with the Greeks, see Herodotus, IX, 4.
- 245 For details of Mardonius's major mistake, see Olmstead, 1970, p. 258.
- 246 For a detailed account of Xerxes I, see, Bashiri, 1988, pp. 2364–2369.
- 247 Cf., Olmstead, 1970, p. 303.
- 248 Some sources relate the incident to the court of Xerxes himself.
- 249 For the reasons for Themistocles's arrival at the court of Artaxerxes I, see Olmstead, 1948, p. 256.
- 250 Ezra 7:7ff.
- 251 Ezra 6:15.
- 252 Cf., Zaehner, 1975, p. 21; pp. 169–170; for the last days of Artaxerxes, see Olmstead, 1948, pp. 352–53; for the state of the development of science in Athens after the Peace of Callias, see Olmstead, 1948, pp. 328–342.
- 253 Cf., Ghirshman, 1965, p. 194.
- 254 For a synopsis of *Anabasis*, see the Appendix.
- 255 For construction activities undertaken by Artaxerxes II, see Olmstead, 1948, pp. 422–24.
- 256 For Artaxerxes III's treatment of his own family, see Olmstead, 1948, p. 242.
- 257 Cf., Zaehner, 1975, p. 21.
- 258 For a discussion of the life and time of Zoroaster, see Bashiri, 2001, p. 525.
- 259 For an explanation of the *farr*, see Bashiri, 1994, pp. 178–188.
- 260 See Soudavar, p. 55.
- 261 Bashiri, 1994, pp. 16–18.
- 262 Cf., Zaehner, 1975, p. 161.
- 263 For a different interpretation of the *Faruhar* as a deity in charge of fertility and prosperity, as well as a representative of the soul of the departed ancestors, see Vahman, 1986, pp. 245–246.
- 264 See, for instance, Zaehner, 1975, pp. 176–177.
- 265 Cf., Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 189–190.
- 266 For an overview of the contributions of the Achaemenids to the development of Aryan culture, see Childe, 1987, pp. 208–209.
- 267 See Ghirshman, 1965, p. 189.
- 268 See, Engels, 1978, p. 144.
- 269 This is at Gordium in Phrygia. Tradition related that the person who loosened the knot would rule Asia.
- 270 Regarding when the *Avesta* was written down, see Settegast, p. 55.
- 271 Cf., Zaehner, 1975, p. 25.
- 272 Some text materials refer to Antiochus the father as Antiochus I, in which case the second Seleucid ruler would become Antiochus II. The principle for the choice here is whether the father was officially a king or not. Cf., Ghirshman, 1965, p. 221.
- 273 For a list of Seleucid kings, see Debevoise, 1938, p. 270.
- 274 Seleucus was the only general who did not renounce his Persian wife after the death of Alexander.
- 275 See Boyce, 1979, pp. 78–79.

- 276 For development of varieties of writing systems in addition to Aramaic during the rule of the Seleucids, see Boyce, 1979, p. 80.
- 277 See Ghirshman, 1965, p. 217.
- 278 For a list of Parthian kings, see Debevoise, 1938, p. 270; see also Pirnia, Vol. IX, Ashkanian, pp. 2619–2621.
- 279 Debevoise, pp. 2–5.
- 280 Debevoise, p. 2.
- 281 Debevoise, p. 7.
- 282 For the separation of the Bactrians and Parthians from the Seleucid dynasty, see Boyce, 1979, p. 81.
- 283 Debevoise, pp. 54–56.
- 284 It should be mentioned that after Arsaces (BCE 250–248), Tirdates I (BCE 248–211) is the actual founder of the dynasty. Mithradates I is the 6th and Mithradates II is the 9th. The latter two, however, created the foundation that lasted some five centuries.
- 285 See Ghirshman, 1954, p. 250.
- 286 Debevoise, p. 55.
- 287 For the Parthians' attempt at fusing Iranian and Hellenistic cultures, see Zaehner, 1975, p. 175.
- 288 Debevoise, pp. 70–75.
- 289 Correlation of Greek and Iranian gods, see Boyce, 1979, p. 82–84.
- 290 For the details of the Battle at Carrhae between Crassus and Suren, see Debevoise, pp. 88ff.
- 291 Zaehner, 1975, p. 22.
- 292 Zaehner, 1975, p. 22.
- 293 For a critique of these legends, see Daryaei, pp. 9–11.
- 294 Alverson, 1988, p. 2411.
- 295 According to the new chronology, Ardavan IV. See Yarshater, 1983, pp. 98–99 for a comparison of the two chronologies.
- 296 See Ghirshman, 1965, p. 290, for a slightly different version.
- 297 Cf., Daryaei, p. 13.
- 298 See the Appendix for the text.
- 299 For a different version of the confrontation between Ardashir I and Ardavan V, see below.
- 300 See Ghirshman, 1965, p. 290.
- 301 Cf., Ghirshman, 1965, p. 290–91.
- 302 For the composition of the coalition headed by Armenia against Ardashir I, see Ghirshman, 1965, p. 291; for details of this victory, see Daryaei, p. 19; for the extent of the Sassanid dynasty under Ardashir I, see also Daryaei, p. 16.
- 303 Alverson, 1988, p. 2411.
- 304 For revival of Zoroastrianism by the Sassanids, see Dhalla, pp. 318–324.
- 305 For Zoroastrianism under Alexander the Great, the Seleucids, and the Parthians, see Dhalla, pp. 293–297.
- 306 For differences, see Dhalla, pp. 368ff.
- 307 For details, see Zaehner, 1975, p. 81.
- 308 For a discussion of the *Amesha Spentas* and creation, see Boyce, 1979, pp. 21–27.
- 309 For aspects of *Uhrmazd*: holiness, justice, mercy, and visibility, see Dhalla, pp. 350–356.
- 310 See Müller, p. 130ff.
- 311 For further information on *Wahman*, see Dhalla, pp. 359–363.
- 312 See Farahvashi, 1968, pp. 447–448. See also Müller, 1970, p. 9.
- 313 For further information on *Ashawahisht*, see Dhalla, pp. 363–364.
- 314 See Müller, 1970, pp. 9–11.
- 315 For further information on *Shahrewar*, see Dhalla, pp. 364–365.
- 316 For further information on *Spandarmad*, see Dhalla, pp. 365–366.
- 317 For further information on *Khرداد*, see Dhalla, pp. 366–367.
- 318 For further information on *Amرداد*, see Dhalla, pp. 367; for the attributes and the actions of

- the *Ameshaśpands* in general, see Dhalla, pp. 357–359.
- 319 For further information on the *Izads*, see Dhalla, pp. 368–374.
- 320 See Boyce, 1979, p. 10.
- 321 Daryaei, p. 22.
- 322 See Nyberg, 1964, p. xxii, for information.
- 323 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 292.
- 324 Hambly, 1966, p. 51.
- 325 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 292.
- 326 For Shapur's interests in various fields of knowledge, see Ghirshman, 1965, p. 294; for detailed information on Kartir, see Boyce, 1979, pp. 109–111; for the role of Kartir at the court of the four Sassanid monarchs he served, see Boyce, 1979, pp. 109–116; for the structure of the bureaucracy under Shapur I, see Daryaei, p. 29.
- 327 See Daryaei, p. 28, for details.
- 328 Daryaei believes that Shapur I intended to create a universal empire and, therefore, was creating a universal religion as a binding agent, Daryaei, p. 40.
- 329 For further details on both of these rulers, see Ghirshman, 1965, p. 296 see also Daryaei, pp. 31–35.
- 330 Cf., deMenasce, p. 204.
- 331 Reynolds, p. 281; see also deMenasce, p. 205.
- 332 See deMenasce, p. 205.
- 333 Cf., Boyce, 1979, p. 130.
- 334 For more information on Manicheism, see Dhalla, pp. 339–348.
- 335 Not to be confused with Shapur I, the son of Ardashir I. This Shapur is Ardashir's brother and Shapur I's uncle.
- 336 See Daryaei, pp. 38–39 for details.
- 337 Cf., Soudavar, pp. 49–52; for an alternate interpretation, see Daryaei, p. 55.
- 338 For details, see Daryaei, p. 45.
- 339 For details, see Ghirshman, 1965, p. 297.
- 340 For Shapur II's persecution of Christians, see Boyce, 1979, p. 119.
- 341 Alverson, 1988, p. 2411.
- 342 For details, see Ghirshman, 1965, p. 298.
- 343 For Yazdegerd I's treatment of Christians, see Boyce, 1979, p. 123.
- 344 See Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 298–99.
- 345 Cf. Ghirshman, 1965, p. 299.
- 346 For details, see Daryaei, p. 61.
- 347 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 300.
- 348 Cf., Daryaei, p. 63.
- 349 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 301.
- 350 Ghirshman, 1965, p. 300.
- 351 For the reasons for Kavadh's acceptance of Mazdak's reforms, see Boyce, 1979, p. 130; see also Daryaei, p. 69.
- 352 Daryaei, p. 70.
- 353 It should be noted that the communism of Mazdak should not be confused with the communistic dicta of Marx and Engels that dealt with 19th-century issues: means of production and equality of all to labor (cf. Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 302–303.)
- 354 Nizam al-Mulk, pp. 264–278.
- 355 For Roman sources on Mazdak and women, see Daryaei, p. 68.
- 356 Cf. Ghirshman, 1965, p. 302.
- 357 For the close relationship between the reforms of Mazdak and the dictates of Mani, see Boyce, 1979, p. 130.
- 358 For more information on Mazdakism, see Dhalla, pp. 348–349.
- 359 Alverson, 1988, p. 2411.
- 360 *Anushiravan* means “of the immortal spirit” and *‘adil* means “just.”

- 361 For his brother's opposition to his kingship, see Daryaei, p. 73.
- 362 For details, see Daryaei, pp. 70–71.
- 363 See Ghirshman, 1965, p. 304.
- 364 Cf., Daryaei, p. 75.
- 365 Safa, 1958, pp. 23–24.
- 366 Alverson, 1988, p. 2411; for more detail on cultural relations with the outside world created at this time, see Daryaei, pp. 75–77.
- 367 See the Appendix for the full text.
- 368 For Hormuzd IV's lineage, see Daryaei, p. 79.
- 369 For further details, see Ghirshman, 1965, pp. 305–06; for details on Bahram Chubin and the significance of his rebellion in Iranian history, see Daryaei, pp. 81–82.
- 370 Ravandi, 1976, pp. 621 and 647.
- 371 Same as Khosrau II.
- 372 Harris, 1977.
- 373 For a comprehensive study of Borbad and his relation to the court of Parviz, see Ariyanur, 1989.
- 374 Warner, 1905–25, vol. 8, p. 398.
- 375 Ibid., p. 399.
- 376 Browne, vol. 1, 1919, p. 183. It should be noted that this is not the Prophet's exact letter and that this rendition embodies the message sent to the rulers of the neighboring kingdoms. Also, cf., Hitti, 1970, p. 121.
- 377 For details on the gradual breakup of Sassanid rule before the Arab invasion, see Daryaei, pp. 93–94.
- 378 For a study of Zurvan, see Zaehner, 1975, pp. 236–247; see also Boyce, 1979, pp. 67–70; for Zurvanism during the later Achaemenids and early Sassanids, see Boyce, 1979, pp. 112–113.
- 379 For Zurvan's doubt and its consequence, see Zaehner, 1975, p. 238.
- 380 For Zurvanism as the religion of Iran under Ardashir I and Shapur I, see Zaehner, 1975, pp. 183–84.
- 381 On *Zurvan*, see Dhalla, pp. 244–45, 331–333.
- 382 Regarding the *mu'bad*'s exactions from the people towards the end of the Sassanid era, see Boyce, 1979, pp. 143–144.
- 383 See the Appendix for full text.

APPENDIX

CYROPAEDIA

In *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon discusses the structure of the ancient Iranian society when Cyrus was young and, later, when he was king. He describes how young people were positioned in society, how hunting was used as a model to teach fighting techniques, and how Cyrus was educated about life at court. Astyages, Cyrus's grandfather, went beyond that and taught young Cyrus the ways of war as well.³⁸⁴

As a youth, Cyrus's relation with the Median court was amicable. Xenophon pays special attention to Cyrus's noble nature, indicating that, at each turn of events, he revealed a genuine sense of friendship and sympathy, especially with regard to the downtrodden. He provides Cyrus's treatment of the Armenian king and his family, and his solutions in deciding the problems between the Armenians and the Chaldeans as examples. He emphasizes Cyrus's grasp of what was worthy of promotion in the lives of people in general, were they kings or commoners.

Young Cyrus visited the Median court very often. As a warrior and commander, he participated in the wars being waged between Media and Assyria and Media and Armenia. Xenophon portrays Cyrus as a brave young man who learned new information very quickly, and who, in making decisions, put the interests of others ahead of his own. At the same time, he expected others to perform their duties commensurate with the attention they received.³⁸⁵ Cyrus often brought the enemies of his enemies to his own camp and used their resources to achieve his own purpose.³⁸⁶

As a commander, Cyrus shared his forces with his friends so that they could overcome their enemies.³⁸⁷ Xenophon shows how, before the final confrontation between Media and Persia, not only the army of Media, but also the armies of other neighboring nations, placed themselves willingly under Cyrus's command.³⁸⁸

The rift between Cyaxares and Cyrus began when, without Cyaxares's permission, Cyrus took the Median army with his Persian forces to fight the Assyrians. In response to Cyaxares's complaint, Cyrus explained that Cyaxares should be happy that he (Cyrus) had put much distance between him and his enemy.³⁸⁹ He actually enumerated his contributions for the well being of Media to convince Cyaxares that all he had done had been to Media's advantage.³⁹⁰ Cyaxares listened but, at the end, confronted Cyrus with the ruse in his words and deeds. In the long run, Cyaxares said, your acts have been beneficial to yourself rather than to my country, my men, or me.³⁹¹

According to Xenophon, a combined force of Medians and Persians, under the leadership of Cyrus, undertook the Lydian campaign. Cyaxares stayed in Media to

make sure that the empire was not left without an overlord.³⁹² After victory was achieved, Cyrus treated Croesus with respect and took him along with him wherever he went, either because he foresaw a need for his advice or felt more secure by keeping him next to himself.

The capture of Babylon happened after the river water was redirected. The dry river served as the road to the city. In Babylon, Cyrus changed from the ordinary commander to a king, and, for days, listened to the complaints, advice, and laudations of his commanders and subjects.³⁹³ He then began his organization of the Empire by choosing individuals and assigning tasks.³⁹⁴ The most important assignments were those of the *satrapies*.³⁹⁵ He paid attention to everything, even his own clothing, as well as the clothing of those close to him.³⁹⁶

In his epilogue, Xenophon ponders the reasons for the gradual decline of the Empire of Cyrus the Great.³⁹⁷

THE CYRUS CYLINDER

(one line destroyed)

... [r]ims (of the world) ... a weakling has been installed as the enû³⁹⁸ of his country; [the correct images of the gods he removed from their thrones, imi]tations he ordered to place upon them. A replica of the temple Esagila he has ... for Ur and the other sacred cities inappropriate rituals ... daily he did blabber [incorrect prayers]. He (furthermore) interrupted in a fiendish way the regular offerings, he did ... he established within the sacred cities. The worship of Marduk, the king of the gods, he [chang]-ed into abomination, daily he used to do evil against his (i.e., Marduk's) city ... He [tormented] its [inhabitant]s with corvée (lit., a yoke) without relief, he ruined them all.

Upon their complaints the lord of the gods became terribly angry and [he departed from] their region, (also) the (other) gods living among them left their mansions, wroth that he had brought (them) into Babylon (Su.an.na.ki). (But) Marduk [who does care for] ... on account of (the fact that) the sanctuaries of all their settlements were in ruins and the inhabitants of Sumer and Akkad had become like (living) dead, turned back (his countenance) [his] an-[ger] [abated] and he had mercy (upon them). He scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him (i.e., Marduk) (in the procession). (Then) he pronounced the name Cyrus (Ku-ra-as), king of Anshan, declared him (lit, pronounced [his] name to be(come) the ruler of all the world. He made the Gutti country and all the Manda hordes bow in submission to his (Cyrus) feet. And he (Cyrus) did always endeavor to treat according to justice the black-headed whom he (Marduk) has made him conquer. Marduk, the great lord, a protector of his people/worshipers, beheld with pleasure his (i.e., Cyrus's) good deeds and his upright mind (lit., heart) (and therefore) ordered him to march against his city Babylon (Ká.dingir.ra). He made him set out on the road to Babylon (DIN-TIR) going at his side like a real friend. His wide-spread troops—

their number, like that of the water of a river, could not be established—strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon (Su.na.na, sparing Babylon (Ká.dingir.ra) any calamity. He delivered into his (i.e., Cyrus's) hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e., Marduk). All the inhabitants of Babylon (DIN-TIR) as well as of the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors (included), bowed to him (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, jubilant that he (had received) the kingship, and with shining faces. Happily they greeted him as a master through whose help they had come (again) to life from dead (and) had all been spared damage and disaster and they worshiped his (very) name.

I am Cyrus, king of the world, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four rims (of the earth), son of Cambyses (Ka-am-bu-zi-ia), great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendent of Teispes (Si-is-pi-is), great king, king of Anshan, of a family (which) always (exercised) kingship; whose rule Bel and Nebo love, whom they want as king to please their hearts.

When I entered Babylon (DIN-TIR) as a friend and (when) I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilant and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, [induced] the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon (DIN-TIR) [to love me], and I was daily endeavoring to worship him. My numerous troops walked around in Babylon (DIN-TIR) in peace, I did not allow anybody to terrorize (any place) of the [country of Sumer] and Akkad. I strove for peace in Babylon (Ka.dingir.ra) and in all his (other) sacred cities. As to the inhabitants of Babylon (DIN-TIR), the great lord, was well pleased with my deeds and sent friendly blessings to myself, Cyrus, the king who worships him, to Cambyses, my son, the offspring of [my] loins as well as to all my troops, and we all [praised his great [godhead]] joyously, standing before him in peace.

All other kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other [types of buildings as well as] all the kings of the West land living in tents,³⁹⁹ brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon (Su.an.na). (As to the region) from ... as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon (Su.an.na) to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which made them happy.

May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him); to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: "Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son, ..." ... all of them I settled in a peaceful place ... ducks and doves, ... I endeavored

to fortify/repair their dwelling places ... (six lines destroyed).⁴⁰⁰

ANABASIS

After the death of Darius II, three figures stand out in the power politics that follows: Artaxerxes II, who is installed as King of Kings; Cyrus the Younger, who tries to overthrow his brother Artaxerxes and fails; and Tissaphernes, the *satrap* of Caria, who supports Artaxerxes II and keeps a close watch on Cyrus and his activities in the *satrapies* of Lydia, Phrygia, and Cappadocia.⁴⁰¹ Pretending a potential war against Tissaphernes, Cyrus, as commander-in-chief of the Persian armies in Asia Minor, gathers an army consisting of Greek mercenaries.⁴⁰² Once all is ready, leading this army, Cyrus leaves Sardis for Babylon, collecting military and financial support on his way.⁴⁰³ A brief discussion occurs among the forces regarding whether they should abandon the expedition and return home, but it does not amount to much and the march continues.⁴⁰⁴

Artaxerxes II does not seem to be alarmed. Even when the army moves through Babylon, there is no indication that Artaxerxes II intends to fight. After ten days of no confrontation, Cyrus assumes that his brother has given up on fighting. His stance becomes casual. His troops, too, leave their weapons on the wagons to make the march easier on themselves.⁴⁰⁵

Then, suddenly, the army of the King of Kings appears and takes Cyrus by surprise. In the Battle of Cunaxa, Artaxerxes II and Cyrus fight hand-in-hand. Cyrus is killed.⁴⁰⁶ Cyrus's army, however, is unaware of the death of its leader. The Greek mercenaries in Cyrus's army think that they have won the battle against Artaxerxes II.⁴⁰⁷

When, eventually, the troops realize that they are at the mercy of Artaxerxes II, they look for the best strategy to leave the battle scene and return home.⁴⁰⁸ A truce is worked out whereby the Greeks promise to stay in place and the King of Kings promises not to fight them. Then an intriguing thing happens. Tissaphernes, whose loyalty Cyrus had doubted all along, invites the Greek generals to his tent for dinner and for discussing plans for the return. Against the advice of some Greeks, the generals accept. Once at Tissaphernes's tent, some of the generals are killed outright and some are dispatched to the King of Kings to be punished for insubordination.⁴⁰⁹

Xenophon, recognizing the peril they are in, advises the Greeks to leave the area immediately. The army chooses him as the leader of the expedition.⁴¹⁰ The army then gets rid of all its carts, tents, and excess baggage.⁴¹¹ Even though they did not have many horses, a cavalry was formed and placed under an Athenian.⁴¹² But their army was no match for the army of Tissaphernes that followed them, waiting for an opportune moment to crush them. Seeing that the Tigris was impassable for them, they headed for the headwaters of Tigris and Euphrates in order to facilitate crossing, as well as for entering Armenia before the Persians could close the passes and keep them at their mercy permanently.⁴¹³

The Greek forces, against all odds, reach the Euxine Sea and, eventually, freedom.⁴¹⁴

THE RISE OF ARDASHIR

Thereupon Ardawán¹ equipped an army of 4,000 men and took the road towards Párs after Artakhshír.⁴¹⁵ When it was mid-day he came to a place by which the road to Párs passed, and asked, 'At what time did those two riders whose faces were set in this direction pass by here?' Then said the people, 'Early in the morning, when the sun rose, they passed by swiftly as the wind Artai, and a very large ram ran after them, than which a finer could not be found. We know that already ere now he will have put behind him a distance of many *parasangs*, and that it will be impossible for you to catch him.' So Ardawán tarried not there, but hastened on. When he came to another place, he asked the people, 'When did those two riders pass by?' They answered, 'To-day at noon did they go by like the wind Artai, and a ram ran after them.' Then Ardawán was astonished and said, 'Consider: the two riders we know, but what can that ram be?' Then he asked the Dastúr, who replied, 'That is the Kingly Splendour (*Khurra-i-Khud'a'ih*); it hath not yet overtaken him, but we must make haste. It is possible that we may catch them before it overtakes them.' Then Ardawán hastened on with his horsemen. On the second day they had put behind them seventy *parasangs*: then a caravan met them. Ardawán asked the people, 'In what place did you meet those two riders?' They replied, 'Between you and them is still a distance of twenty *parasangs*. We noticed that beside one of those riders a very large and mighty ram sat on the horse.' Ardawán asked the Dastúr, 'What signifies this ram which is beside him on the horse?' He answered, 'May'st thou live for ever! The Royal Splendour³ hath overtaken Ardashír; in no wise can we now take them captive. Therefore weary not yourself and your horsemen more, nor further tire the horse, lest they succumb. Seek in some other way to prevail against Artakhshír.' When Ardawán heard this, he turned back and betook himself again to his home.⁴¹⁶

THE INVENTION OF CHESS AND BACKGAMMON

In the Name of God

It is said that the king of India, in order to test the wisdom and knowledge of Iranians at the court of Khosrau Anushiravan as well as for his own personal benefit, devised a chessboard—sixteen pieces of emerald, sixteen others of red ruby—and sent it to the court of the Shah. This board, which was brought by Tatrakatvas, the best among all Indians, was accompanied by 1,200 camel loads of gold, silver, jewels, and pearls and 90 elephant loads of feminine gowns and ornaments.

The king of India, in an accompanying letter, wrote: "Since you are the king of

kings and, therefore, king over all of us, your wise men must be wiser than our wise men. If you can, explain the workings of this board; otherwise send suitable tribute."

The king asked for a three-day respite. None of the learned men could explain the mystery of the board.

On the third day, Buzurgmihr of Bakhtagan rose and said, "O King, may you be immortal. To this day I have not revealed the workings of this set so that you and all Iranians shall know that in the land of Iran I am the wisest. I will explain the workings of the set and will keep the Indians under tribute. Furthermore, I will devise a different board and send it to the king of India. This will be made in a way the Indians will never be able to explain and they will have to pay us double tribute. This also will prove that our wise men are wiser than theirs.

Three times the king of kings said "Bravo Buzurgmihr" and ordered the Treasury to give him 12,000 *dirhams*.

The next day, Buzurgmihr summoned Tatrakatvas and said to him: "In this game Sachidarm has utilized war tactics. First of all, there are two head-lords who know the rules. He has likened them to two kings. He also has likened the rooks to left and right towers (auxiliaries), the Queen to minister of war, the bishops (Persian elephants) to his supporters, the knights (Persian horse) to his cavalry, and the pawns (Persian foot soldiers) to his infantry." After this explanation, Tatrakatvas played three games with Buzurgmihr. Buzurgmihr won all three games. His success filled the Iranians with pleasure.

Tatrakatvas stood up and said: "May you remain immortal. God has bestowed on you glory, luck, strength, and victory. You are the king of Iran and exterior-Iran. This chess set, after its invention, was given to a committee of Indians to solve. A big prize was to be given to the person who could reveal its workings. No one could solve it. Your Buzurgmihr, due to his knowledge, solved it with speed and ease and with that he added a treasure to the treasury of the king of kings."

The next day, the king summoned Buzurgmihr and asked him: "Buzurgmihr, what is it that you said you would make and send to Sachidarm?"

Buzurgmihr said, "Among the recent rulers of the house of Sassan, Ardashir was the most active and the most learned. I will invent the backgammon in his name. In it I will liken the board to the holy earth; its thirty days and nights; fifteen white pieces to fifteen days and fifteen black pieces to fifteen nights. I will further liken the throw of the dice to the movement of heavenly bodies and the revolution of the earth. I will liken the first piece to *Uhrmazd* (God) because He is unique and because He created all the good things.

I will liken the second piece to thought and the world and the third to 'good thoughts,' 'good words,' and 'good deeds.' The fourth, I will liken to the mixture of nations as they come from all four corners: the east, the west, the north, and the south. I will liken the fifth to light since the sun, the moon, the stars, the fire, and the comet come from the sky. Finally, I will liken the sixth to the six *gahanbar* festivals. In this manner, the invention of backgammon will be a recreation of the world by *Uhrmazd*, and the movement of the pieces will be the same as the

existence of people in the world: they collide with each other and leave the world. The next arrangement of the pieces, after the board is cleared once, is like the Resurrection Day when all dead come to life again.”

This [explanation] came at an auspicious hour when the king was happy. He ordered 12,000 horses to be decorated with gold and pearls. Along with this he had 12,000 worthy youth with 12,000 armors, seven ... and 12,000 Indian steel swords, 12,000 belts and seven ... to be prepared. He further provided 12,000 men and horses as well as other praiseworthy items. Then the king chose Buzurgmihr as the leader of this caravan and sent him to India.

After his meeting with Buzurgmihr, the king of India asked for forty days. But none of the wise men of India could explain the workings of the backgammon set. Finally, Buzurgmihr, after receiving double the amount of tribute, returned to Iran in glory and pomp.⁴¹⁷

³⁸⁴ Xenophon, I, c. 4, 6–15.

³⁸⁵ Xenophon, IV, c. 4, 37–55.

³⁸⁶ Xenophon, IV, c. 6, 2–10.

³⁸⁷ Xenophon, II, c. 1, 4–6.

³⁸⁸ Xenophon, III, c. 1, 8–41 for Armenia; c. 3, 4–31 for Chaldea and Assyria. See also V, c. 1, 19–26.

³⁸⁹ Xenophon, IV, c. 5, 24–34.

³⁹⁰ Xenophon, V, c. 5, 15–24.

³⁹¹ Xenophon, V, c. 5, 25.

³⁹² Xenophon, VI, c. 3, 1–2.

³⁹³ Xenophon, VII, c. 2, 20–29; c. 5, 58–86.

³⁹⁴ Xenophon, VIII, c. 1, 9–39.

³⁹⁵ Xenophon, VIII, c. 6, 1–5.

³⁹⁶ Xenophon, VIII, c. 40ff.

³⁹⁷ For the reliability of *Cyropaedia*, see Avery, p. 35.

³⁹⁸ The old Sumerian title appears here in a context which seems to indicate that the primitive concept concerning the intimate connection between the physical vitality of the ruler and the prosperity of the country was still valid in the political speculations of the Babylonian clergy.

³⁹⁹ This phrase refers either to the way of life of a nomadic or a primitive community in contradistinction to that of an urban society.

⁴⁰⁰ Sami, 1970, pp. 460–464.

⁴⁰¹ Cf., Olmstead, p. 369.

⁴⁰² Xenophon, A I, 1.

⁴⁰³ Xenophon, A I, 2.

⁴⁰⁴ Xenophon, A I, 3.

⁴⁰⁵ Xenophon, A I, 7.

⁴⁰⁶ Xenophon, A I, 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Xenophon, A I, 10.

⁴⁰⁸ Xenophon, A II, 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Xenophon, A II, 6; see also Olmstead, 1948, pp. 374–376.

⁴¹⁰ Xenophon, A III, 1.

⁴¹¹ Xenophon, A III, 2.

⁴¹² Xenophon, A III, 3.

⁴¹³ Xenophon, A III, 5.

⁴¹⁴ Technically speaking, Xenophon's *Anabasis* should be regarded as a combination of *anabasis* and *katabasis*. “*Anabasis*” means movement of troops from the sea to the interior; that's what Cyrus the Younger did. “*Katabasis*” means movement of troops from the interior to the sea, i.e., what the 10,000 Greek mercenaries under the command of Xenophon accomplished.

415 Same as Ardashir.

416 Browne, 1919, vol. 1, p. 143.

417 Nyberg, pp. 118–121.

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